

# **PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI**



## **PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

### **DAILY HANSARD**

**TUESDAY, 28TH JULY, 2020**

**[CORRECTED COPY]**

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**TUESDAY, 28TH JULY, 2020**

The Parliament met at 9.34 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

**PRESENT**

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications.

**MINUTES**

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 27th July, 2020, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

**COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR**

HON. SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to today's sitting of Parliament. I also welcome all those watching the live broadcast and the live streaming of today's proceedings. Thank you for taking an interest in the workings of your Parliament.

Honourable Members, I have been advised that there are no Bills for consideration today, so we will move on to the next Item on the Order Paper.

**RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE 2020-2021 APPROPRIATION BILL 2020**

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, as you know, we have a Batting List and I have agreed to a change in the order of the Batting List on the request that was given to me.

I now call upon the first speaker this morning, the Honourable Aseri Radrodro. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- The Honourable Speaker of the Fiji Parliament, the Honourable Prime Minister and Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, fellow Honourable Members of Parliament and fellow Fijians; I rise to deliver my contribution to the 2020-2021 Budget Debate where, at the outset, I will have to admit that I am unable to lend my support for various reasons that I will outline.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is not easy for me to say some of the things I need to say today. It grieves me that the human heart is so stubborn at times that we simply refuse to heed well-intended advice given out of love for our country and our people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this will be my sixth year as a Parliamentarian. Since I was a rookie in this august House in 2014, I have asked that our Government treat the advice that is forthcoming from the Opposition Benches with due consideration and value.

Ironically, Mr. Speaker, Sir, no one predicted that the year 2020 would experience a pandemic that only comes around after every 100 years, at the very least. Despite the unpredictability of this pandemic, some of us have been urging Government to relook at the foundations upon which our development, as a nation, have been founded upon. Key words, such as “sustainable development”, “good corporate governance”, “be realistic”, obviously fell on deaf ears, and hearts as cold as stone.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Hansard Reports will capture my many statements in this august House. I have critiqued and warned that our heavy reliance on tourism, remittances and even sugar was going to be our downfall when a global financial shock is experienced. The global volatile environment will render us powerless to control our destinies and the massive job losses we will encounter would be difficult to comprehend.

I spoke about the austerity measures that the World Bank and other financial institutions, such as the Asian Development Bank, were imposing on Fiji in the form of various reforms that were counterproductive to instilling patriotism, courage to delve into the world of entrepreneurship, and even achieving dreams.

I had lamented the lack of genuine incentives that would drive and encourage our people to be inventors and investors. I had questioned the hand-out mentality that the FijiFirst Government had created in our people; freebies that became increasingly glaring as we drew nearer to national elections. I had decried the opening of restricted activities by Investment Fiji that no longer protected our domestic markets.

Today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I look at the border lockdowns and feel a burden, like no other. My heart is heavy with grief and anger, especially when I see the massive job losses that have resulted, with families struggling to make ends meet.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, well before COVID-19 came, it must be declared that the FijiFirst Government was robbing our people of their right to be the masters of their own destinies. People no longer had control over their livelihoods. Even with an education, contracts were limited and reduced to yearly renewal for civil servants. Redundancies were done subtly through job advertisements and many who had meritoriously worked for many long years for Government, lost their jobs to the name of Minimum Qualification Requirements (MQR) standards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, I had given credit where it was due and commended the various developments that Government had implemented. But, a lovely highway is not enough if it merely becomes pothole-ridden after a while, nor is the beautiful Albert Park, or even is National Stadium meaningful, if people are unemployed and do not have the means to be able to enjoy the various recreational activities that those venues host.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our economy could have done better in the face of COVID-19, had we been focused in a big way on enhancing our non-sugar agricultural sector, our building industry, our manufacturing sector, as well as capitalising on our digital and ICT sectors. We should have been building on our fisheries and forestry sectors to gain us access to international markets and reverse our trade deficit and grow our export sector. It is time Government needed to do the right thing and stop building castles in the sand, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to raise my concern on the continuation of grants given to the Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC), following default in payment of \$25 million in bonds held by the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF). This resulted in Government being called to make this payment as the guarantor for FSC. This is a classic example of pouring good money after questionable investments.

I will not mince my words when I say that this industry, over the years, has chewed so much investment by Government whereas the dairy industry continues to receive a meagre allocation and this year, it is only \$700,000. The inability of the Government to provide some real solutions to alternative programmes will continue to haunt us, especially in light of the global pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also wish to raise a question on the reduction in the Government's investing receipts from \$216 million to \$7.3 million. I note that in August 2019, the FNPF had successfully acquired 20 percent of Energy Fiji Limited (EFL), worth \$220 million, which is equivalent to 100 million shares partially divested from the 500 million shares. The question is, why is the balance of the sale of 400 million shares not reflected in the Government's investment receipts in this 2020-2021 Budget? This is a deception, this is injustice! Where is the reality in the revenue that is being projected?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the Shadow Minister for Infrastructure, I now wish to make some comments on the budget provided to the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA). I note that the budgetary provision of \$348.9 million is mostly under restricted disbursements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is now a standing joke about where have all the monies gone to, given that the state of our roads around the country continues to deteriorate to the point of being risk-hazard to travelling commuters. We also note the increased level of borrowing from external financial institutions on this FRA budgetary allocation amounting to \$87 million, an increase from \$54 million in the last Budget. The question is, whether all these funding that are provided are being utilised for their intended purposes, like road rehabilitation, as well as for bridges and jetties?

The monitoring element of this expenditure is unclear, given the latest FRA Annual Report which was tabled in Parliament for the year 2016. It is now 2020 and the delay in reporting questions the good governance on how these funds that were poured into FRA over the years have been disbursed. Mr. Speaker, Sir, a further question that also needed to be raised is, why were those road rehabilitation programmes continue to be outsourced to foreign companies, such as the China Railway Group and Higgins, for example, whose key labourers are foreigners?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, whilst the rehabilitation and restoration programmes budget have consistently been significant amounts, the quality of work done remains questionable, given that most roads are back in a deplorable state. It seems that the works carried out are no longer as consistent, nor up to a professional standard as it used to be during the days of the Public Works Department (PWD). The fact remains that the significant increase in cost of repairs and road rehabilitation from PWD days to FRA is exponentially high, but it certainly becomes a nightmare of quality over quantity, thus putting the lives of commuters at risk.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will continue to draw analogies between the two entities because I firmly believe that PWD's style of operation should be re-established, and do away with the FRA's outsourcing of private contractors. What we would like to see is a hundred percent domestic workforce that has a genuine sense of responsibility and accountability by workmen, who know that the art of their hands and their labour will be their legacy and their show of loyalty and commitment to our communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government needs to utilise our trained and qualified engineers, our many craftsmen, labourers, mechanics, builders and those who have gained, not only the necessary qualifications but also have the desire to build legacies through global standard infrastructures, such as bridges, buildings, jetties and infrastructure that our people have experienced in establishing.

The Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) has an increase of \$12 million allocation from \$183 million last year to \$195 million for this budgetary term. The allocation is targeted at extending rural water supply programmes. Similar to FRA, the accountability of this massive fund is unclear as there has been no up-to-date annual reports submitted. The last report tabled in Parliament dates back to 2013 and 2014.

Mr. Speaker, this kind of poor corporate governance displays the lack of transparent utilisation of funding which is a matter of concern, given that significant areas of our communities in rural settings continue to await properly-treated piped-water connections. Again, Mr. Speaker, we raise concerns on the utilisation of these significant expenditures on foreign companies, such as China Railway Group, when our local companies should be supported with work that develop the capacity of our domestic market in both, experience and expertise, as well as employment opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, briefly speaking on the transport sector, for Government Shipping Services, an allocation of \$8.6 million has been granted, a reduction of \$1.2 million. The reduction in allocation raises questions on the Government's priority to look after the provision of Government services to our maritime islands.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Shipping Franchise Scheme has been allocated a budget of \$2.6 million, which is an increase of \$0.6 million from the previous year's budget. I acknowledge Government for heeding my earlier call, to give certainty to shipping companies servicing uneconomical routes to more remote parts of the country by granting longer term agreements through the shipping franchise, where it is now going to be 15 years, an agreement to be established with the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Tourism and Transport. This initiative will give meaningful security to financial institutions to loan to small shipping companies for instance, and in turn allow the companies to invest in new ships, therefore, ensuring more reliable and efficient services to our maritime islands.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend Government for encouraging Private Public Partnership arrangements with *yasana* and *tikina* holdings or cooperatives to engage in this shipping investment opportunity. This support, of course, must come with necessary training and monitoring to be provided for those who will run their shipping business so that they sustain themselves and be viable in the long run.

Mr. Speaker, on a similar note, it is timely that I see such arrangements provided to the shipping industry by Government. So, I ask, why could Government not do the same for Civil Service employment contracts which is now on short-term duration only, with some on annual basis and some a little longer? Such short-term contracts is not conducive to long-term planning for families and as such, many are unable to cope with the restrictive work environment today, especially in light of COVID-19.

On Land Transport Authority (LTA), Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government's operating grant of \$20 million has been allocated, which is an increase of \$2.2 million from the previous budget. Mr. Speaker, I question this increase, given that some LTA Offices have been closing down during this COVID-19 period and a lot of services are not being rendered, like the Defensive Driving Course, which is a key requirement for licence renewal and licence upgrade. I also take this time to raise my concerns on the manner in which bookings are being mercilessly done by LTA and police officers on our roads during these difficult times. They need to consult more with the FRA.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you cannot gloss over the underlying problems that LTA has, where management have been ill-treating staff in working on reduced hours, yet the operating grant has increased. Something does not add up, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Big Sam, no doubt, drives a questionable bus.

On Fiji Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF), a grant of \$3.9 million has been granted which is a slight increase of \$300,000 from last year. The latest available Annual Report for MSAF dates back to 2013, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The trend of late submission of Annual Reports is worrying, especially with Government's continued provision of budgetary allocations, despite the lack of accountability to taxpayers. Whilst the entities may be meeting its internal reporting requirements, it is disconcerting that Government sees no urgency to demand the same level of accountability and table the necessary Annual Reports in a timely manner in this august House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Infrastructure has been given a budget of \$30.6 million, which is a reduction of \$4.7 million from its previous budget. The Energy Department has a budgetary allocation of \$13.2 million, a reduction of \$3.7 million. These operating expenditures are mostly for grid extensions and house wiring in rural areas.

On this note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to raise the plight of some communities who are waiting for the provision of rural electrification, for example, Korovou Village to Narokorokoyawa Village, also in Nasiriti Village, Nasoqo Village, Roma Village and Nawaisomo Village in Naitasiri.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for Korovou Village, it is now two years since the grid extension has been established, as well as house wiring completed for individual homes and yet, they are still awaiting the provision of electricity. Can we have an explanation from the Honourable Minister on the cause of the delay and an update on how these Villages are likely to get electricity? We are waiting for an explanation from the Honourable Minister.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I note that the Government has announced in the National Budget Address that the Civil Service Cadetship Programme is being re-established. This, for me, is welcome news because I have, in the past, spoken about the PWD Apprenticeship Scheme and it teaches tertiary school graduates through attachments within the various divisions of PWD. This type of nurturing and up-skilling or on-the-job training so to speak, drives and helps our labour market become resilient and provides a ready pool of trained employees.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this initiative is timely and warranted. Many of our top career civil servants went through such training ground which is now more prudent than post COVID-19 where it will be best that we train our people for our job markets rather than bring in the many expatriates that we have to rely on, like the \$0.5 million paid Chief Executive Officer of LTA, who is a terrible burden on our taxpayers' coffers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my colleague, yesterday, spoke at length about the Budget announcement that has offered very little for the ordinary person. It is mostly targeting businesses that are seen as employers who continue to survive and provide not only employment, but also much needed tax revenue for Government. Whilst I understand that the mechanics of capitalism will require businesses to be supported by way of economic activities that will drive our income and expenditure ultimately.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on that note, I would like to note that the Turaga ni Koro and Mata ni Tikina allowances remain stagnant at \$1.4 million and \$428,000 respectively. If Government preaches about

being a responsible employer, I reiterate my call that they should also be entitled to pay superannuation contribution to the FNPF.

I tend to be an avid listener, Mr. Speaker, of global news and I have followed with interest how countries have provided support to their people through this pandemic. Many have had their rents being paid by government, many have had electricity concessions, groceries supplied, whilst others have monetary assistance provided. So, for us as a developing State, it is sad to have an economic boom for the last 10 years, yet we have zero to show by way of assistance to our people to benefit from - no cash handouts this time around, no grocery assistance for the now unemployed, no proper support for farmers, like *dalo*, *yaqona* and dairy farmers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to be able to address as well the many needs of our farmers and I take this time to also raise the issue of pesticides, like paraquat, that have been banned for use. An alternative product farmers have been encouraged to use is the Samurai, which I am told, now kills *dalo* plants and even the *dalo* itself, if the liquid product somehow manages to get into the plant. I have been asked by farmers to seek reconsideration of their plight and perhaps, allow paraquat to be offered through a special licensing offered for farmers only.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is something that has been niggling when I look at this Budget, my doubts about the genuineness of our economic boom. Pre-COVID-19, Government has raised the price of passport to a massive over 100 percent, compared to the previous cost. Now, post-COVID-19, with travel restrictions, departure tax has been reduced to only \$100, yet the price of passport remain outstanding as high as around \$250 or more, as compared to the previous cost of \$70.

Similarly, with the decrease in oil prices resulting from COVID-19, bus fares have yet to drop. Also birth certificates and marriage certificates, as well as police clearance cost, are astoundingly high following the recent COVID-19 cases.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must now pay tribute to the nation's success in containing COVID-19. For that, I congratulate Government and its Officials, who continue to work around the clock to address and eliminate any further lingering COVID-19 threats in our communities. Mr. Speaker, Sir, how often have we, as a people, ignored the uncertainty of our existence, mistaking it for probabilities generated by our statistical model? How often have we ignored our vulnerability by pretending that we are in control of our destinies? The COVID-19 pandemic shows us how wrong we are.

It is now widely acknowledged that Coronavirus shows us how terrible it really is to waste our lives, embroiled in endless battles for wealth, status and power. How terrible it really is not to recognise the value of the people around us, not just our families and friends, not just colleagues and fellow citizens, but also complete strangers. How terrible it is not to give our lives meaning every hour of everyday by honouring the sacredness of life and accord all living things the respect, sensitivity and care they deserve.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what the FijiFirst Government fails to realise is that, in most of our endeavours, we are interdependent. An individual cannot succeed without the cooperation of others. We cooperate at many different scales - local, regional and international. The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the danger of ignoring our interdependence and the importance of global cooperation. It demonstrates to us that our economic, political and social system can serve our needs and purposes, only when they induce us to cooperate at the appropriate scale.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I challenge us all in this august House and I encourage our community leaders, let us be more honest with ourselves and leave aside our tribal, racial, religious and political



differences. This is a time when we need to stand united as one. I will leave us with a word of God, taken from the good Book of Galatians 3:28, and I quote:

“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Jesus Christ.”

Let us take heed. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Aseri Radrodro for his contribution to the debate and I now give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Tevita Navurelevu. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. RATU T. NAVURELEVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to contribute to the debate on the 2020-2021 National Budget.

I must convey my sincere gratitude towards the most highest, our God Almighty, for His gracious love that allows my presence here today. Before I speak on some of the issues in responding to the 2020-2021 National Budget, I wish to plead to the Government to reconsider its stance and declare that the Holy God Jehovah and the son Jesus Christ is the most highest, and the Almighty is the sovereign of this nation.

As far as I believe, God allows this situation, the global pandemic purposely to test the power, the ability, strength, knowledge and the wisdom of leaders when leaders reject and neglect God and the power of God. God has the power to:

- give and the power to take away;
- close and the power to open;
- increase and the power to reduce;
- allow and the power to decline; and
- for everything all over this world.

I plead to you, Honourable Prime Minister, please, reconsider your decision, recognise and acknowledge God and place God in His rightful place and put God first before FijiFirst. There is no other way to find the solution to all those situations. God, the Father and the Son Jesus Christ is the true solution, Halleluiah!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to propose a way forward for us - the leader of the Government, leaders of various groups and communities, leaders of churches and every one of us should come to a sense of realisation asking these questions:

- Are we doing things according to the will of God?
- Are we doing things right?
- Are we doing things honestly?
- Are we practicing the fundamental principles of good governance?
- Are we respecting the rule of law?
- Are we respecting our freedom and liberty granted by the love of God?

Answering many questions of realisation would change our motive and transform our mind and humble ourselves before God, who will bless us and our nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Book of Chronicles 7:14 reads, and I quote:

“If my people who are called by name shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face I will hear from heaven and forgive their sin and I will heal their land.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this current situation is only reminding us that God still has the supreme power over this world.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in Psalms 91, it reads, and I quote:

“He that dwelth in the secret place of the most high shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord he is my refuge and he is my fortress in God him I trust.”

We can say that He is our defender and our protector. We can say that He will keep us safe from all hidden dangers and from all deadly diseases.

In the last verse God says, “I will save those who love me and will protect those who acknowledge me as Lord.” Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hope this message is very clear and I request our leadership, the Government, to realign our stand and to acknowledge and put God first before anything else.

Let me respond to the 2020-2021 National Budget. Mr. Speaker, Sir, like some of my colleagues on this side of the House have stated that the COVID-19 pandemic is a blessing in disguise for the FijiFirst Government. In just four months ago, they ushered into this House a special Budget under the blanket of COVID-19 Response Budget. If the unprecedented growth in our economy was real, as they always like to boast about, then there was no need for a new budget, especially when we were few months away from the next budget announcement. Mr. Speaker, Sir, that shows the level of desperation, and the truth of the matter is, there is no money, as Honourable Nawaikula used to remind them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2020-2021 Budget is yet, again, a doomsday Budget. I would like to place on record my support for the statement by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition that this is an irresponsible, rudderless and deceptive Budget. It has failed to address the impact of crisis to help our local communities and ordinary citizens to recover quickly.

Food security, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the experience of ordinary citizens in our rural communities on the impact of the global pandemic proves the disconnection between the Government and our local communities. Our nation has been relying heavily on processed and imported goods and services in the recent years. This has increased the vulnerability index of our ordinary citizens in times of crisis. That is why, in my local community, the *Vanua* of Namuka, we are re-weaving our social net so that we are not caught off-guard in any crisis as we have witnessed that the FijiFirst Government does not have the capacity to lead us out.

From our experience and inspiration of our Lord, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are now focussing on reviving our social structure and mechanism to address food security and enable us to save for the rainy days. If the situation deteriorates and comes to worse, when there will be no food items on the shelves in supermarkets, we still can feed our families with food sources available and rich on our land and our fishing ground.

However, the inconsistency in policies which is the hallmark of the FijiFirst Government has hindered us from fully implementing our local social mechanism. One such policy is the ban on the harvest of bech-de-mer or sea cucumbers. This ban was done without any consultation with the *vanua* and the *i qoliqoli* owners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, bech-de-mer or sea cucumbers have been our livelihood for generations. The ban on the harvest have forced our local communities to work extra hard in improvising our local produce that will help them make ends meet everyday.

And now in the midst of these trying times, the Government consulted us on the lifting of the ban. The *Vanua* of Namuka welcomes this initiative to lift this ban for, at least, one year as it will benefit us hugely. I thank the Honourable Minister for Fisheries in advance for his compassion in agreeing to uplift the ban as soon as possible. Thank you, Honourable Minister, for your good and compassionate heart.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to put on record that public consultations should always be considered before the Government imposes any piece of legislation. The right of the indigenous for a free prior and informed consent should be respected by Government.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I plead on the Government, not only on behalf of the *Vanua* of Namuka but on behalf of all rural and remote communities for their consideration in divesting resources into Agro Marketing. This, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will strengthen their scope of work and will help us in confidence that our local produce will not go to waste, on the other hand, it will boost the economy of our nation.

Infrastructure; in addition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a hindrance to our locals is the deteriorating state of our roads, especially in the North. The pathetic road condition in the North has been ignored for a very long period. I have witnessed the road from Naiyarabale to Korotasere and Natewa Bay from Wainigadru to Nasinu (*Boto ni Toba*), when I travel through those roads on the 15th of this month. The road from Nasasa to Valovoni, they have been waiting for a very long time, despite their request to upgrade the roads. Those are some indications of lack of funds and obviously, a decline in growth of the economy. Where is the unprecedented growth in our economy?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as Shadow Minister for the Police portfolio, please allow me to speak briefly on this. I acknowledge the increase of \$37 million in the allocation to the Fiji Police Force. However, I am dismayed at few of the allocations that have warranted this increase. Firstly, the \$40 million allocation for the construction of new police stations in Nakasi, Nadi, Lautoka and Nalawa. The timing for such allocation is just not right, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We could have diverted this allocation into strengthening local industries that will create employment.

Speaking of employment, I would like to briefly respond to the claim made by the Honourable Prime Minister earlier yesterday, stating that the construction of these new police stations will create employment for construction workers. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need real solutions and not band-aid ones. Employment for the construction will only go for a few months, compared to the creation of employment by strengthening our local industries, as this offers a more realistic job security. Therefore, the construction of these new police stations can be deferred when we are in good days again.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to acknowledge the \$13 million increase in the allocation for salary and wages. This is a great sight, especially during these trying times. However, I hope the resources are also diverted to building and mending the social fabric between the Force and the community that have been torn for sometimes. Recruiting more police officers will not be able to curb the crime on the streets if we do not build trust and foster a peaceful community.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to echo the voice of one of our successful local businessman in Labasa and former Member of Parliament, Mr. Charan Jeath Singh, who said, and I quote:

“The COVID-19 Budget is betrayal of the poor and full of empty and meaningless bluster. Where is the equality of sacrifice, consistency of policies and prioritisation of expenditure that the Government demands from all others and exempt the rich, the powerful and the privileged?”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I join my colleagues in the Opposition by not supporting the Budget due to the fact that the Budget is irresponsible, rudderless and a deceptive one. It is a Doomsday Budget. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Ratu Tevita Niumataiwalu for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Assistant for Youth and Sports. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A.T. NAGATA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament; I rise to make a brief statement in support of the motion before the House.

Mr. Speaker, before I proceed, I wish to acknowledge and thank God for bringing us all this far, the same God who brought Moses and the Israelites out of Egypt, the God of Noah, David, Daniel and Esther, Who has never changed. He has been with us in both good and bad times. When we are faced with natural disasters or pandemic, He is here watching over His faithful people.

I thank the Honourable Prime Minister for his sound judgment and good leadership. I thank all the dedicated health workers in taking the lead role in the fight against this dreadful disease. I thank the Disciplined Forces and the hardworking civil servants for their commitment and perseverance. I also take this opportunity to thank everyone, especially our youths, who have become resilient and have turned into backyard gardening and farming for food security. Thank you to everyone who have assisted our local farmers in buying their produce and all those who have taken advantage of the local barter trade platform to help those in need.

Also, I wish to commend and congratulate the Honourable Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications; the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Economy; and the hardworking team for a faithful and forward-looking Budget, a Budget that is inclusive and leaves no one behind, a Budget that is well thought-out and that will address the crisis that is currently faced by the global economies and a Budget that proves that the FijiFirst Government is committed to being responsible, not just fiscally, but socially and environmentally.

The 2020-2021 Budget lays the foundation for Fijians to have better lives and assist them through the crisis. This Budget will make sure that all Fijians continue to have access to the high quality public services they need and deserve, such as health, education, housing, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, as a Ministry, we thank the Government for the budgetary allocation and would like to state in this House that we will ensure our mandated duties are carried out within our means and with that, we will rise above all expectations.

Mr. Speaker, the two core programmes coordinated and facilitated by the Ministry of Youth and Sports are centred on the provision of assistance to youths through advisory, empowerment and capacity building, including specific skills training and the development of sports and its infrastructure nationwide through the provision of grants to the Fiji National Sports Commission

(FNSC) and National Sporting Organisations (NSOs), as well as the provision of basic sports equipment and the development of rural playing fields. The Ministry focuses on these developments to ensure that our youth are empowered and have access to good sporting infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, the 2020-2021 Budget has, again, included new initiatives and areas that the allocation will be utilised to further its work and fulfil its mandated duties. The allocation will allow our Ministry to continue and further the work that has impacted the lives of our young population. The initiatives and areas are on:

- supporting community-based capacity building;
- promoting youth leadership;
- promoting the development of sports at all levels; and
- expanding access to sporting infrastructure for the Fijian people to encourage healthier living.

Mr. Speaker, under the community-based capacity building initiatives, the core responsibilities of the Ministry of Youth and Sports are the establishment of a policy environment that provides strategic support systems, initiatives for personal development, character building, sports policy implementation and community-based youth-led programmes.

Mr. Speaker, one of the community-based capacity building initiatives in the 2019-2020 Budget was the \$20,000 allocated to the review of the Fiji National Youth Band. The Ministry has completed the review and stage one of the recommended action plan outlines initiating assessment of institution curriculum towards Fiji Higher Education Commission accreditation and full recognition certification. This will require a full curriculum review by an expert consultant and will address the National Development Plan in promoting education and training of young people to secure decent employment. This will achieve an outcome of new blended creative industries and Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) curriculum.

The \$25,000 allocation in the 2020-2021 Budget will go towards the first stage of the review recommendation and that is the review of the National Youth Band curriculum, which will allow the Ministry to work in collaboration with the Fiji National University and engage an expert consultant to conduct the review of the curriculum.

Mr. Speaker, the promotion of youth leadership is an important aspect of the Ministry's empowerment programme. In promoting the programme, the Ministry continues to take the lead role in the implementation of the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Programme where each individual undergoes development on life skills and character development. The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award promotes leadership through the adventurous journey, and participants are able to manage the delivery process of the Programme and effectively participate in the Programme.

Mr. Speaker, the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award is a daring programme that could change the lives of our young people between the ages of 14 years to 24 years, and have gained our people with awards on bronze, silver or gold levels. The Award is a balanced programme with the framework of four sections - service, skills, physical recreation and adventurous journey, plus residential project at gold level only.

Nearly 600 young people take up the Award each year with over 100 award volunteers actively participating in the Programme. Over 3,000 people have gained an award with approximately 50 schools, youth clubs and organisations being involved with the Programme. In 2019 and 2020,

a total of 548 participants were being awarded. These included; 56 from the Central Division, 23 from the Eastern Division, 22 from the Northern Division and 447 from the Western Division.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Youth and Sports views sports development as an integral component of developing and empowering young people and the country as a whole. This perception has been established from the fact that young people closely associate themselves with participation in sports.

Mr. Speaker, through the technical assistance offered by the FNCS and other sporting bodies in terms of Sports Outreach Programme, we, as a Ministry, are actively engaging with communities and sports stakeholders around the country to promote sports. Not only that, Sir, in doing so, we are also reaching out to our minority groups and red zone areas, through the Fiji Community Policing, to ensure that they too participate in our programmes and register youth and sports clubs. This, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a true reflection of the commitment of the Fijian Government to develop sports in our country.

Mr. Speaker, during the pandemic, our Ministry, together with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and the FNCS, put together a Safe Sports Fiji Protocol Framework Compliance Certification System. This was necessary to assist our NSOs into return to training and later to competition.

All NSOs are requested to have this compliance certificate in place, before they are allowed to hold any training or competition. While the role of the NSOs is clearly outlined, we must also understand that we all play an important role as athletes, coaches, administrators, or even as fans to be guided by these protocols.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in expanding access to sporting infrastructure for the Fijian people to encourage healthier living, \$100,000 has been allocated to the "Construction of Hardcourts". This project is aligned to the provision of sports and recreational activity facilities in densely populated areas, as a means to change people's lifestyle by participating in sports or recreational activity, and also fight against NCDs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity and I fully support the motion before the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Assistance Minister for Youth and Sports for his contribution to the debate.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Niko Nawaikula. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Like you, Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the debate and a lot of rubbish is coming from the other side, more specifically from the Honourable Minister for Fisheries; the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport; the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development; and the Honourable Assistant Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- What about me?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, you too!

(Laughter)

Everyone from that side, yes, they are talking rubbish.

Mr. Speaker, because it makes me very, very worried that they do not appreciate the mess that our economy is at. This side of the House, as well as the whole public, is reminding you of the economic mess that you did. They do not appear to understand that in 2018, they lost revenue of nearly \$1 billion. They do not appear to understand that in 2020, another \$1 billion was lost, and they have to cut budget by \$1 billion, and they still feel that it is a boom, something must be wrong.

They are like Nero, playing the fiddle while Rome is burning. They remind me of the two cities in the *Bible* - Sodom and Gomorrah. They are in self-denial, they do not know the problem that we are faced with - they should appreciate that. And, Mr. Speaker, I think the problem lies with one person, the Honourable Minister for Economy. He is not an economist, and please, he is not here, tell this to him.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- He is not a qualified economist, and he thinks he knows everything and he does not take advice.

His former colleague, Graham Davis, says that he pushes in his ideas, he crashes his ideas through, so all the policies that are there that have brought us to our knees in relation to our economy, have come from one person. So, appreciate that - he is a Jonah in the sinking ship, and you know what to do with Jonah - read the *Bible*. Please, do the needful...

HON. MEMBER.- Talk about your Leader!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ... if you want to save us. Well, the problem is, we are also passengers in that sinking ship, and you know what to do with it. I will not advise you but if you do the needful, you know what to do with Jonah.

The second point that I wish to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I, like everyone, was trying to look for a word or two to describe the Budget that we have and I have been listening to them.

HON. MEMBER.- ... brave, bold Budget.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Honourable Dr. Govind said, "It is a well thought-out Budget", all rubbish!

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Honourable Kirpal said, "A wonderful, progressive Budget".

(Laughter)

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Yes, it is.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development said, "... thoughtful, progressive, bold Budget."

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Yes, it is!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- But that is a lie. We should be honest with ourselves.

I am not an economist nor an accountant, but I read from Page 1 to the last one for three nights and this is what I have gathered - it is a bogus, pretentious, dishonest Budget. And the reason is this is, the Budget does not express our true capacity. We can reduce much, much more in terms of expenditures but the Budget is not saying that. We can reduce our deficit much, much more ...

HON. MEMBER.- That's beside the point.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ... but the Budget is not doing that, and there is a very, very cynical motive, and the motive I feel like you too is that, this Budget is playing victim.

We are telling the whole world that we are in a sorry state so that they can give aid to us and ironically, the Honourable Minister for Economy said that we will not rely on aid but that is the effect, that is the whole purpose of this dishonest and bogus Budget, and for that reason, it is totally irresponsible. We should be honest. "You lack intellectual honesty", to quote the Honourable Minister.

We are fooling the world that we are the victim so that they can give to us, and they already acceded, Australia has already given \$20 million, but let us be honest and tell the world that we can do this.

Honourable Speaker, before I move on, let me rebut some of the statements or rubbish that is coming from that side.

The Honourable Minister for Fisheries thanked the Budget for supporting the primary resource-based sector, but there is no support there. Honourable Minister, you have \$15.5 million in your allocation and it is \$582,000 less in the last Budget, so where is the stimulus? There is no stimulus there.

By stimulus, we mean export-driven projects. If the Honourable Minister had said, "Okay, we are getting half a million to increase the export of pearls or prawns, or to revive the Ika Corporation", then that is stimulus. This Budget is only maintaining its status quo, and I am sorry for you.

(Laughter)

HON. CDR. S. KOROILAVESAU.- I am sorry for you.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- He referred to the removal of transshipment levy but that is secondary, that is done by the Ministry of Economy. The things that you do yourself, please, totally wrong.

It is the same for the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment. You have \$16 million and the totality of the primary ministries is about \$3 million more, but that is to be like a mystery word.

(Laughter)



HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, it is not to incorporate new produce or new agricultural export, so where is the stimulus?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- How will you explain?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I hope so, but it does not say in the Budget. The Budget does not say that you are being stimulated.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Where does the \$2.7 million go to? It is not going to the Ministry of Agriculture, it is not going to the Ministry of Fisheries, nor is it going to the Ministry of Forestry, but where is it going?

HON. MEMBER.- Stimulated.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, I hope so. Well, if he tells me, it will not be from the Budget because I am reading from the Budget book. Very bad!

The Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport accuses us of living in the past, but he should know that if you do not learn from the past, you will never progress. The people will hold you accountable for the \$35 million you lost, \$35 million he wasted, threw into the sea for that golf tournament.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- He used to say here, Mr. Speaker, that we are punching above our weight, but you have taken this and thrown it out. A third party who organised that must have benefited from that \$35 million and where are we now? Even in 2018-2019, tourism was going down. So he is personally responsible for losing \$35 million...

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- \$45 million.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ... \$45 million of hard-earned income and you should answer for that. I am not joking, he should answer for that. Tell the public.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- What is the use? He took this money and threw it away. And the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport said the growth was 3.2 percent which was the gross and he did not look at the net which was 1.75 percent, and even if we take 3.2 percent, it is still less than the period when Ratu Mara was in government.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The point is, where is the unprecedented? Where is the boom? There is no boom, there is only doom!

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Listen, listen!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- What, you are probably looking up the wrong numbers.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me now go to my speech. I am the Shadow Attorney-General and I will talk on that sector, as well as the independent bodies and commissions. But I want to say something first in general about this Budget.

The first point that I wish to say is that, the FijiFirst Government is guilty of reckless mismanagement of our economy, that is, from 2006 to-date. Boom, that they say, is doom for us and our children and they must first admit that. We are asking you, "Please, admit it. Accept the responsibility. Do what you need to do with Jonah because he is the one captaining the sinking ship."

Mr. Speaker, this is now their 14th year and I wish now to compare that with Ratu Mara's Government, who ran for about the same period. Every time I sit down and think of this, I coined a word for Ratu Mara, that he is one of the great fathers of this nation and that is not because, Mr. Speaker, that he is your father in law, it is because he has vision.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Well, you will not get extra minutes.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- There are big differences. Ratu Mara's Government was responsible, it was fully democratic and more importantly, it was investment-driven. Just look at the investments that he did; PAFCO, Fiji Pine, Mahogany, he did all those at that time and we are benefitting now. And you? That side of the House, ask yourselves, what have you done? Consume, consume and consume!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And you are consumption-driven. You are not like Ratu Mara - Ratu Mara did invest for us. You are not only consumption-driven, you sell all the assets that Ratu Mara had maintained for us and there is nothing left.

You look at the Budget, there is nothing left to sell. Instead, they ran up huge debts - \$2.5 million up to last year, and that is about half of what the other prime ministers and governments were there; Ratu Mara, Qarase, Rabuka. Now, their total debt is around \$7 billion, giving the national debt total to \$9 billion. What for? What were all those debts for? Consumption, consumption and more consumption-driven, of course, by politically-motivated reckless spending and nil investment, nil investment, nil investment.

Where is your investment? What have you done to this nation, compared to what Ratu Mara did? You just eat, eat and eat! And, Mr. Speaker, the figures speak louder for themselves.

If you average the growth of our economy, as I have already said, 0.75 percent, there is nothing unprecedented there. There is no boom there. What is dangerous there is that this so-called

growth was consumption-driven as opposed to investment-driven; one day it finished and when the consumers felt it, it all came crushing down in 2018. You lost \$1 billion of revenue, shame on you!

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- That is before COVID-19. This is not COVID-19, this is before COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, last year, we were forced to cut budget by nearly \$1 billion because of that. So, where is the growth? Growth in the airport? Well I tell you what, there is nearly \$1 billion waiting for us there in terms of guarantee for our Fiji Airways. That is the cost for that fleet that is now grounded, and we have just approved a guarantee of \$455 million. So, that is a mess.

From 2019, we were in recession.

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we were in recession then, we are in recession now, and this is all before COVID-19 came in this year, and these were funded by debt and debt and debt. So, it gives meaning to the often said word, “GDP *na dinau*.” So, our GDP came from what we have borrowed and that is really true. Please, accept responsibility for your economic mismanagement, and the results are out now - reduced 1.7 percent growth in 2018, recession of -1.3 percent contraction in 2019, forecasted to be further 0.24 percent. Remember that, there it is. So why all the jumping up and down, there is nothing to celebrate.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the second point that I wish to say is that, the deficit of \$2.7 billion is way too much. Why was it not reduced because it can be done very easily and it must have a cynical motive, if you like? The deficit in this Budget is \$2.7 billion, but revenue has been dropping - nearly \$1 billion in 2018 and after that short collection, it was reflected in the Budget deduction last year of nearly \$1 billion.

We wish to average \$4 billion in revenue, and it has come down to \$3 billion, to \$2 billion and next year, \$1.66 billion. So?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- So?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- So, you answer me!

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Tell us! COVID-19 came in 2020. I am talking about 2018 and 2019.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Every country in the world is in the same situation.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, now, but before that we had already minus, we already had recession last year. We already had \$1 billion loss in revenue in 2018.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I have already given them their solution - Jonah. Do what you have to do with Jonah.

Mr. Speaker, revenue is expected to decrease again next year by nearly \$1 billion.

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Now, this time. This is only when COVID-19 comes in. Now, we are talking COVID-19 but before that, you were already bad, you were already wasted.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And all this jumping up and down when \$0.5 billion from 38 percent of the GDP from tourism will be wiped out. There is nothing to celebrate in here, we have to be concerned. We have to be responsible, and that is not coming out from their speeches.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is not coming out, you are totally irresponsible and with all that equation, you would expect that the overseas lenders would be able to give us even less. Last year, we borrowed about \$800 million. So with all this coming in, we expected to only achieve \$400 million. But, no, we are asking for \$2.7 billion! Why?

Now, fair enough, we need to stimulate our economy but, Mr. Speaker, we must also make sacrifices. To me, this Budget is saying, "All right, we can enjoy our good lives while the Government goes and borrows more." That is what the Budget is saying. It is very, very foolish, indeed, because there are many comforts that we can do away with, and reduce our budget.

Firstly, we can easily reduce the deficit by \$1.25 billion, if we ask for a moratorium on the charges. Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$1.7 billion is the cost of servicing our loan. If we go and ask the lenders, "Please, give us a moratorium", that will reduce it to \$1.25 billion. So why has our Honourable Minister for Economy not done that?

Another way of reducing the deficit is to refrain from listing within the budget everything that is under requisition because they would not be done anyway. The total for that is about \$1.4 billion. So, if you minus (do not list the requisition), we will only have a deficit, it will be reduced by \$1.3 billion. The question we ask, why has the Honourable Minister for Economy not done that?

There are other simple things that we can do, like, removing unnecessary expenditures, such as:

- \$7 million for the Prime Minister's Office, do we need that? We do not need it.
- \$40 million for the Police Reform, we do not need that.
- Vehicle licensing - \$57 million.

Therefore, my conclusion is that, they have intentionally deceived everyone, of our capacity in order not to borrow more and not to get aid.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will use this last time that you left for me to talk about the Ministry of Fisheries and the Ministry of Agriculture. The short word that I use here, they are no stimulus. The totality of their budget has been increased by \$4 billion, but that \$4 billion is for capital construction, to build a chemistry laboratory and other things. It is not to stimulate the economy, so I am very sad for you Honourable Minister. You have nothing. From the \$2.7 billion, they have nothing more to stimulate what they can do. So we ask them, where is this \$2.7 billion going? It is not going to the primary industry, it is not going to agriculture, it is not going to fisheries and it is not going to forestry.

We need projects, like what Ratu Mara did. We need to replant our pine. Do we have anything there? You do not have any anything there to replant our pine. We need to have money invested in there for the mahogany. So, the Honourable Ministers responsible for the primary industries, very sorry, and the problem is Jonah. Do the needful.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Nawaikula for his contribution to the debate.

On that note, Honourable Members, we will suspend proceedings for refreshments in the Big Committee Room and Parliament will resume in half an hour. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.44 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.19 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the debate on the Budget, and I give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Forestry. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen; I rise to affirm the Ministry of Forestry's full support to the 2020-2021 National Budget that was presented on 17th July, 2020. I wish to commend the Honourable Minister for Economy and staff of the Ministry, particularly for a visionary Budget that sets the platform for a smart recovery.

The Ministry of Forestry has been allocated \$15.7 million and it intends to strengthen its work in the various areas that will help with the environmental, social and the economic recovery from COVID-19 and the tropical cyclones that have caused much damage in recent months.

Suffice to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is not so much the amount that a Ministry receives, but how it uses the allocated funds to secure maximum returns which matters the most. The new Budget will, for instance, enable the Ministry to assist Fijians who have lost their houses during *TC Harold*, to put a decent roof over their heads.

About \$1.5 million is allocated for maritime pine development and purchase of harvesting machines and equipment. These funds will complement Government's housing rehabilitation in the islands.

Following *TC Harold* in April, the Ministry deployed equipment and staff to help with re-purposing fallen and damaged trees. It has purchased additional portable sawmills, and is enlisting the support of the Republic of the Fiji Military Forces to help build roads to ease the extraction of trees. In about 11 weeks working with the islanders, we managed to re-purpose timber for close to 200 houses. The new Budget will accelerate the efforts to ensure that we re-purpose timber for all the damaged houses within the next few months.

In the meantime, the Ministry is collaborating with other agencies, including the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and the Ministry of Housing and Community Development, to start re-building houses up to Category 4 cyclone standard. This is the commitment Government is making to the people to build back better and stronger.

The Ministry also recognises that the global pandemic has caused job losses and the closure of operations for many companies. It is, therefore, exploring opportunities to meaningfully engage with some companies with the recovery operations in the islands. This will help reinstate some jobs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Forestry's core responsibility is to sustainably manage our forest resources. This is pivotal in building a resilient economy and society that can withstand the impacts of climate change and global pandemic.

Sustainable forest management can help lift communities out of poverty, while also protecting the environment and enhancing biodiversity. So far, more than \$300,000 has been paid out under the Ridge to Reef Programme.

About \$2 million of the new Budget will enable the Ministry to continue implementing the Cash for Tree Planting Programme, which provides the opportunity for Fijians who have lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic to earn some cash by planting trees in their communities. This

money will enable the Ministry to scale up its efforts towards the planting of 30 million trees in 15 years under the Reforestation of Degraded Forest Programme and the Ridge to Reef Programme, which is supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the *Fiji Sun* on Monday, 20th July, 2020, told the story of how the tree planting programme has helped sustained Mr. Mesake Dralolo and his family of Koromakawa Village in the District of Wairiki in Labasa. Mr. Dralolo was a food and beverage worker in one of the resorts. He lost his job due to COVID-19 and had to return to his roots and toil the land. He is one of many Fijians who have migrated to the rural areas. I had the opportunity to meet him during my visit to the Northern Division last month. As part of the tree planting programme, he is able to earn some money for his family.

So far more than \$300,000 has been paid out under the Ridge to Reef Programme and Government has spent about a million dollars buying seedlings mostly from community nurseries under the Reforestation of Degraded Forest Programme and planting trees. These programmes not only empower people economically but they also drive home the importance of nature. The new Budget will definitely assist more people like Mr. Dralolo and his family.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the last 19 months, Fijians from all walks of life have continued to plant over two million trees and mangroves. We have had children as young as two years old, youth, women and men in their twilight years, all taking part in tree planting because they believe in restoring nature. All these Fijians are part of Fiji's green recovery. The Ministry has also established a dashboard for members of the public to register the trees they have planted, and these records can be viewed publically.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's tree planting revolution is also aimed at off-setting our carbon outputs. The expected signing of the Emission Reduction Programme Agreement with the World Bank will set the platform for Fiji to start trading in carbon on a larger scale. This could be an attractive alternative to logging. This is part of Fiji's contribution towards addressing climate change. Lest we forget, the COVID-19 pandemic does not take away the fact that climate change still poses an existential threat to our people and planet. This simply means that we have to build back smarter.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the tree planting revolution is also aimed at developing greener towns, cities and communities. The Ministry of Forestry is collaborating with the Ministry of Local Government, Housing and Community Development, Agriculture and Environment to support our green recovery and food security. Fiji's tree planting initiative is, in effect, an extension of the global movement to protect our forest and pristine natural environment and where possible, restore ecosystem balance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, today's reality as a result of COVID-19 is that, the forestry sector's contribution to Fiji's economy as measured by GDP, is projected to decrease. However, the Ministry intends to facilitate the gradual increase by engaging more meaningfully with the private sector, and providing assistance, such as longer term licences to encourage economic investments and job creation.

The new Budget will enable the Ministry to continue to support Fiji Pine Limited through the removal of invasive species, amongst other things. This will help Fiji's leading player in the forestry sector to continue to gain traction in securing foreign exchange for the country through consistent exports and continue to put more money into the pockets of the landowners, something that no other Government has done, except for the FijiFirst Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is also supporting the Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited (FHCL) with its forest certification which focusses on the sustainable management of resources and

chain of custodies. This will ensure that mahogany products can access lucrative markets which will in turn help increase the sector's contribution to Fiji's economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on this occasion, I wish to inform this august House that Honourable Bulanauca's statement on the mahogany industry yesterday was not only misleading, but also irresponsibly misguiding the mahogany landowners. Honourable Bulanauca obviously plucked his figures from thin air, but I am happy to share the correct production figures as follows:

- (1) 2017 - the industry produced 2,005 cubic metres;
- (2) 2018 - the production increased to 15,587 cubic metres;
- (3) 2019 - the production increased to 19,801 cubic metres; and due to COVID-19,
- (4) 2020 - the production figures are currently at 7,359 cubic metres

However, it is expected that the industry will produce an additional 20,000 cubic metres in the next five months.

Additionally, and importantly, I am pleased to share with this august House that FHCL has now received confirmed orders from both, domestic and overseas markets for the next five years. The FHCL is also positioned to achieve a harvesting quota of 80,000 cubic metres or more each year. The Honourable Bulanauca also misquoted the reforestation figures.

The FHCL has replanted over 4,000 hectares and not 509 hectares. Yesterday afternoon, Honourable Leawere also made some misconstrued remarks on the support to the landowners and just before morning tea today, the Honourable Nawaikula made general and, again, misplaced remarks on the Budget, as not being a stimulus for the primary industries. It is highly irresponsible of the Honourable Members on the other side of the House to misinform this august House and the nation. The truth, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that, FHCL has always empowered landowners in numerous ways, especially economically, by meaningfully engaging them in both, harvesting and reforestation of mahogany leased land. Reforestation in particular, is reserved solely for the landowners.

The FHCL is also working closely with the Fiji Mahogany Trust (FMT) to set up landowner businesses to actively participate in the mahogany industry, and Honourable Bulanauca is fully aware of this as he was the former Chairman of the Fiji Mahogany Trust. Together, they have helped landowners in Nukurua, Dreketi, Sawakasa, Seaqaqa with the latest being the Nadarivatu landowners, who will commence logging operations tomorrow.

The FHCL had given the rights to the landowners to be the main logging contractor. In addition, FHCL, continues to provide assistance to landowners for village building projects, jobs for plantation maintenance and church building materials in Serua.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, like any new business, the mahogany industry is taking a while to grow, but with the flourishing relations between FHCL, FMT and the landowners, it is anticipated that this growth will gain momentum as we secure markets that will result in the injection of more money into the pockets of landowners and into our economy. The forest certification for mahogany, in addition to improvements in the licencing system, log pricing and ongoing *yaqona* involvement will provide the catalyst for sustainable growth in the industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry estimates that there will be a surplus of timber products from the maritime islands once the housing rehabilitation is completed. To help prepare for the influx of timber, the Ministry is now able to issue export licences within 24 hours through investments in technology as part of our business processes re-engineering.



The new budget will also enable the Ministry to develop online applications for all its other licensing procedures to facilitate the ease of doing business. Importantly, the Ministry will continue to explore opportunities for targeted programmes in the forestry sector based on public-private partnership.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a combined \$2.2 million is provided for research and development both, in silviculture and on timber utilisation. The Ministry intends to strengthen its research capabilities through smart partnership with research institutions locally and internationally. Its findings will help support the sustainable management of our forest resources, emphasising the notion that our work must be informed by science.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in our efforts to provide the many uses of forests, the Ministry has secured over \$400,000 to maintain the Colo-i-Suva Forest Park and other nature reserves around the country. These reserves are aimed at protecting forest areas and biodiversity, providing opportunities for research, education and recreation.

The Ministry plans on extending the ecotourism concept to attract the increasing number of environmentally and climate change-conscious travellers both, domestically and when our borders are open.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition and various so-called economists have criticised the Budget but they have not done so in measured terms. They have not provided viable alternatives that will help create realistic opportunities to reposition the Fijian economy to operate under the new normal. Their criticisms and judgments cannot change the fact that at this juncture in the Fijian economy, there cannot be a smarter and more responsive Budget than this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the Government's belief that all Fijian families matter and no one should be left behind, my Ministry will effectively mobilise its allocated budget and programmes to deliver an effective response to the pandemic, improve our mandatory functions and ensure we build back better. As the world battles the COVID-19 pandemic, it is increasingly clear that restructuring our economy with nature-based solutions is needed for this required quantum shift.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, after visiting over 200 villages since the National Tree Planting Initiative was launched in January last year, I know that when Fijians unite in the face of challenges, our nation will emerge stronger and better than before. I also know that when Fijians work together, there is very little that we cannot achieve. I repeat, when Fijians work together, there is very little that we cannot achieve and I speak not only for this side of the House but also for some Honourable Members on the other side.

In my recent visit to Vanua Levu, I saw this unity, especially with Fiji's tree planting revolution. The support from Honourable Nawaikula's Village in Buca Bay, Honourable Bulitavu's Village in Korowiri and Honourable Ratu Niumataiwalu's Village in Namuka, suggests that they are finally coming to terms with the realities of life. The three Honourable Members are taking the lead role in mobilising their communities towards tree planting. I urge them to continue the good work, not only in supporting Fiji's tree planting revolution but also in supporting the Government's visionary plans that are aimed at providing a sound recovery from the global pandemic in laying the platform for a secure future for our people. This will be one of the noble things they could do for God and country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in supporting the 2020-2021 Budget, I call on all Fijians to unite and help with the transformation into a more resilient and stronger people and nation. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

HON. SPEAKER. I thank the Honourable Minister for Forests for his contribution to the debate.

I now call upon the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yesterday, the Honourable Prime Minister talked about 'Biman's Breakfast'. Therefore, I wish to report to the Honourable Prime Minister that I actually had two cups of coffee with my breakfast this morning.

I do not know, Mr. Speaker, if the *Fiji Times* will report this, but if the Honourable Prime Minister had bacon and egg for breakfast, the *Fiji Sun* would report that the Honourable Prime Minister also had a piggery and raised the chickens.

Every year, Mr. Speaker, I respond to the Budget Address, and I focus on the same problems. Those problems never change, and the root cause of them, in my view and the view of many other people in this country, Mr. Speaker, is the poor leadership of this Government. I have heard the Honourable Members of Parliament and Honourable Ministers from the other side of the House, praised the leadership, but I suppose, Mr. Speaker, they have to do that, and that is part of their job.

This year, the Honourable Minister for Economy talked about boldness and courage. Mr. Speaker, it does not take courage to cut import duty on luxury cars and electric hairdryers. There is no courage there, that is spending.

As my colleague, Honourable Jale, said yesterday, the Honourable Minister and his Government turned up to Parliament more than an hour later to deliver the Budget Address, with no apology and no explanation. That is not courage, that is not boldness, but that is disarray and disorganisation. Even on the Budget night, Mr. Speaker, this Government did not know what it was doing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it takes courage to face the people and say, "We are sorry that for years, we have been spending our way into massive debt and we are sorry that when you have lost your jobs and income, we cannot help you." That is what this Government should say to the people of Fiji.

The Honourable Prime Minister joked about what I had for breakfast, but if he had read the *Fiji Times*, he would know the truth, Mr. Speaker. Thousands of children have had no breakfast, they are going hungry right now. But he also knows that they are tired about all the Government's talk and no action. They know hungry children cannot wait, so people are taking actions themselves. The real leaders of our country, Mr. Speaker, I dare say, are no longer in Government, they are outside, and they are on this side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, it does not take boldness and courage for this Government to go into debt. They know that they will not be around to fix the problem. The Honourable Minister for Economy knows it, we all know it. We all know, Mr. Speaker, that the economy is not the only thing on life support. In fact, the future of the FijiFirst Government is on life support.

Mr. Speaker, it is too late to fix the situation we are in. The damage has been done, and I want to focus on the future and the economic solution Fiji needs. But before we go there, Mr. Speaker, we need to understand where we are and how we got here, only then can we understand what must really change.

It is very important to tell the truth to the people of this country because they need to know the truth. First, the Government has no economic vision for Fiji. It just makes up things as they go

along. Suddenly, they have abolished stamp duty, suddenly it has reduced taxes on alcohol and suddenly, it has changed the tax incentives for tourism investment.

Every year, Mr. Speaker, mystery surrounds each Budget. No one knows what is coming. Of course, the Honourable Minister likes it that way because that makes him the centre of attention, I guess. But this is, Mr. Speaker, bad for economic certainty and continuity. We all know this and investors know this. Investors do not know what is coming, they cannot plan ahead and whatever happens this year, they know it can easily change the following year.

Mr. Speaker, this is a Budget of panic. After years of ignoring the tourism industry, the Government has decided to cut tourism taxes. We had warned the Government many times in the last four years, and Honourable Gavoka did the same. The Government has decided to cut tourism taxes now, it is abolishing business licences and stamp duty and all these, it says, is to make the economy more efficient.

But for almost 15 years, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government has been running the economy, it has refused to listen to anyone else. The Government always knows best, so why has it suddenly started talking about making the economy more efficient now? This year, the Government has taken the so-called bold measures.

But, Mr. Speaker, many people whom I had talked to, many businesses, they do not believe that this will stay. There is no permanence because next year, they will want to raise more money. Government will want to raise more money. They will just bring back those things that they rolled back, like stamp duty and business licences. They will just call them something different. They will lift the tourism taxes again; this is all what people and investors are saying.

Secondly, the Government has no money. Last year, Government's own calculations were \$1 billion below Budget. That is there for anyone, before anyone in this country or anywhere in the world, Mr. Speaker, heard anything about Coronavirus. This is the truth that they need to tell the people.

They need to go out and tell the people, they cannot just put all the blame on what has happened – the economy was in trouble well before Coronavirus. What happened to the economic booming and the Bainimarama Boom that we had last year? The truth is out now. The economy did not grow last year, it actually went backwards, it was minus 1.3 percent, so the economy was already crashing.

Then, Mr. Speaker, the Government keeps borrowing money. For years, we have warned about the state of Government debt. They were telling us that we did not understand debt sustainability. The Government has spent like there is no tomorrow and this year, that tomorrow has come. We now face the biggest economic crisis Fiji has faced in 50 years as an independent nation and the Government has no money to help.

The Government is telling the people, Mr. Speaker, Sir, who have been made unemployed, "We will give you \$220 per fortnight." But this is not the Government's money, this is the people's money. This is what is in their FNPF balances. The Government is topping up some people's balances but with whose money, the World Bank's money, the IMF's money, the Asian Development Bank's money because our own Government has run out of money well before the Coronavirus.

Mr. Speaker, there will be more crisis. Climate change means more crisis, and they understand that. In the last 20 years, Suva has not been (thank God) hit by an earthquake or other natural disasters. But one day if it does, where will the money come from then?

Somewhere, someone down the line, everything is likely to crash with the way this Government is going, Mr. Speaker. It will be a double disaster. The Government will have so much debt that it will have to, again, tax the people hard to pay it back and people who have FNPF to look after them in their old age will have nothing to live on. But, Mr. Speaker, this Government does not care because this Government knows that when this happens, it would be someone else's problem.

Mr. Speaker, let us understand the headline figures in this Budget and my colleagues on this side have talked about this. Two years ago, it was \$3.2 billion. In the year that just ended, Government raised only \$2.7 billion, now it is down to \$1.6 billion and that is understandable. This coming year, the Government must repay the \$1.2 billion in loans and interests. That is the fact and that is in the Budget Estimates.

Every Fijian should understand how bad our situation is because it is very important for our people to understand that. Next year, Government will have to raise almost \$100 million, just to pay off loans, this is before the Government can spend a dollar on bandages for our hospitals and textbooks for our school children.

Apparently, Mr. Speaker, Sir, while people go hungry, the Honourable Prime Minister must have a new office. I do not accept this idea that when you have a bigger priority, then you need to engage in construction. The economics of it, we understand, but what is the priority right now? The priority is something else, this is a Government who does not understand priority but even he must pay off this year's loan before he can pay the whole thing. How are we going to pay the rest of the Government to run, Mr. Speaker, Sir?

We are going to borrow more and, indeed, another \$2 billion more, Mr. Speaker, Sir. What are we going to do in the year after that? Because the Government said it will only collect \$1.8 billion next year and the same amount in the year after that, this is what the Government tells us about next year.

This is in the 2020-2021 Budget Supplement. In the coming year, we said that we will spend \$3.6 billion. Then he promises that we will spend about \$2.3 billion, which is the target for the 2021-2022 Budget, and then \$2.2 billion in the 2022-2023 target. This Government is going to cut spending next year in the following year's Budget by \$1.3 billion. Now, I want to ask the Honourable Minister, when that \$1.3 billion cut comes, what are they going to do? If that is the case, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would say to the Honourable Prime Minister that he should cut his Cabinet size to five and save some millions of dollars to do other things because the Ministers will have no budget. They will have nothing to do, the Permanent Secretaries can run the show.

But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me say this, there is an Election coming up in 2022-2023 and we all know what this means to the FijiFirst Government - big spending, freebees and strategies to win votes. So, this expenditure that has been projected is not going to be around. So, the Government will keep spending and we will keep borrowing, and Fiji will get deeper and deeper into debt. By the end of this Government's term, Mr. Speaker, Sir, by the end of 2022, I predict that Fiji's debt to GDP ratio would well be above 100 percent or higher. That is the reality that I want to tell the people of this country.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- What is wrong?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- There is plenty wrong in that, Honourable Prime Minister. More and more of our money will just go to paying off our loans.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to look urgently to the future. What will get us out of this mess? We need economic strategies that deal with our short-term and our long-term problems. Let us begin with our short-term problems. This is the start of the worst short-term problems, the people are going hungry in this country, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

This economic crisis means that people are going without food. Nowhere in his speech did the Honourable Minister talk about this because I think it will be too embarrassing for the Government so he talked about the global economy. They talked about what is happening in other countries but nowhere did they talk about how to help people who are struggling put food on their table.

However, everyone in Fiji knows. Ask the school owners, for example, the TISI Sangam, who are preparing lunches for students. Ask ordinary citizens, like Ms. Ana Lockington and Mr. Narayan Reddy of Lautoka. Together, they have gathered a group to supply groceries to hundreds of families in the Lautoka area, also uplifting the lives of hundreds of rural women for more than a decade. Ms Sashi Kiran of the Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises & Development (FRIENDS), who is now expanding their work to look after the underprivileged.

I was astounded, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that a person of her character and capability was ridiculed yesterday by the Honourable Minister for Employment through his interjections, as having a political agenda. Ask Ms. Shamima Ali about how women and children are struggling to put food on the table. Ask the people who are supplying food parcels to hungry families in Lami. These are the real problems our poorest people are facing, Mr. Speaker, Sir. While ordinary citizens work to solve this problem, the Government looks the other way.

People who have contributions in FNPF may get access to their money, they may even get some top-up from the aid money that Government is receiving, but what about farmers, fishermen and casual workers, such as gardeners and house-helpers? Their income depends on others having money, so who will help them?

All over the country, ordinary citizens and religious and charitable organisations have stepped in to fill the gap. They have spoken up. They have told the Government what is really happening. These are people with skills and experience, have deep social networks and the passion to help others. These are the people who should be the Government's partners, who can deal with the deep economic and social pain that the poorest in our country are feeling. Why is the Government not supporting them? But from the Government, nothing! No money, no support, not even encouragement, not even thanks for the work they are doing! The Honourable Minister just pretends that they are not there.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, everyday, the Government has the opportunity to partner with the civil society, not just in times of crisis, in education, welfare and issues, such as health and domestic violence. But everyday, the Government is looking the other way, because of how this Government thinks. Only the Government may control things, only the Government may get the credit for helping others.

The first thing we need, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is long term partnerships, people working together, our people helping others and Government supporting this with cash and good policies. Everyday, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a missed opportunity.

Next, Mr. Speaker, what are we doing with our own time now? Tens of thousands of people have lost their jobs. Many of them have skills that they could pass that onto others. These are skills, such as basic numeracy, literacy, budgeting, better health and nutrition, growing food and protecting

the environment. These are skills we should be building for the future. Why is the Government not starting programmes to build skills while people have the time to acquire these skills?

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is time for us to share in making the economic policy we have talked about for many years. The Honourable Leader of the Opposition talked about it. We need a national economic summit process to discuss future economic policies, not a one-day workshop, but an economic summit to chart the economic vision and carry it out. This is how we start, Mr. Speaker.

The economy belongs to us (everyone), it belongs to employers, workers, the richest and the poorest, and it does not belong to this Government or to a single Minister. For example, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to ask, what is the future of the sugar industry? Thousands of people still depend on it. The industry is supposed to have been reformed. There is a new mechanical harvester here and there, and a new feeder road upgrade; this is not reform.

Government has been talking about reform for many years, there is hardly any reform there. We are still producing bulk sugar to sell at prices below our cost of making it, and we are selling it to people who do not even want to buy it now. Our business model has not changed for over a hundred years. The Government has been talking about it for the last 13 years. But the world has changed and Fiji has also changed and many people are tired of supporting the sugar industry because they see no change there. Why is there no conversation about what must change? We have talked about this many times in Joint Parliamentary Committees, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are now going to encourage new industries, such as agriculture, outsourcing services and new technology. The Government seems to think that this can be fixed through tax incentives and everything will be fine. But that thinking, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has been an absolute failure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not know whether the Honourable Minister for Education watched the *Mai TV* Programme, but on Sunday, the five commentators there, in fact, talked about the dire state of Fiji's education system and the need for change. I wonder if the Honourable Minister is rethinking about the idea of an Education Commission to look at the whole education system in this country that we have talked about. I think this is probably not a bad time to think about an Education Commission.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the solutions we have suggested, and many of them have highlighted some very specific areas where Government can look at that, but everyday those solutions are becoming more and more relevant. We have suggested those before to the Government and, of course, we all know the Government's response.

Mr. Speaker, this is a time of severe economic crisis. We need a Government that is not afraid to ask for help and new ideas. They need to have the courage. They are in Government, they are in power, so asking the Opposition and asking those who criticise them is not a sign of weakness. In fact, it is a sign of strength or it will be a sign of strength for this Government to ask for help. We need the leadership of a government that will bring together all of our people to put our best ideas for a common and economic social vision. We wrote to the Honourable Prime Minister and we know his reply in Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, I would urge the Government to show some leadership, show courage, show boldness, shed the evil, shed the arrogance and bring people together. But I want to tell the people of this country, Mr. Speaker, that, that will not happen until this Government is gone.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, most people in this country today are now praying for that day. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Professor Prasad for his contribution to the debate.

I now call upon the Honourable Assistant Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Honourable Members of Parliament, respected fellow Fijians who are watching live on the Fijian Government *Facebook* page and other media outlets; it is my honour and privilege to stand in this august House and deliver my supportive response to the 2020–2021 National Budget.

However, Mr. Speaker Sir, before I do that, allow me to take a moment to thank the Almighty God for His interminable blessings to our beloved nation, to free us from the grips of COVID-19 which has turned out to be one of the deadliest pandemic at global level. Having said that, I wish to admirably salute our Honourable Prime Minister for steering this nation in these trying times with great passion, commitment and enthusiasm.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to declare my full support for the 2020-2021 National Budget.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. J.N. NAND.- The Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy should be commended for announcing a scintillating National Budget which turned our worries into comfort and increased the level of optimism and hope around the country, and for developing a Budget which is undoubtedly the best in this current circumstances. It has left many critics and financial commentators flat-footed in terms of what the Budget has offered to all Fijians.

The Ministry of Economy team was on the ground from day one, talking to Fijians and determining what they needed before putting it in the Budget. This was a very important exercise because it gave the FijiFirst Government a clear picture of the situation and allowed us to make proper allocation of resources.

Also, not forgetting the commitment by other Honourable Ministers, members of the Government and each and every Fijian who had risen above the occasion to battle this virus and its impact. Had we failed to act promptly, we would have had another sad story about Fiji, just like some big renowned powerhouse nations in the world that are currently struggling to find their footing in terms of the COVID-19 pandemic. I am sure that the lessons learnt through the impacts of COVID-19 have now made every Fijian even stronger than what we used to be.

While many said that they never expected such a bold Budget, I am saying, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that it is not a surprise Budget and I am saying this because the FijiFirst Government is very competent in turning things around. We have done it with many Government statutory and private institutions around the country that have suffered heavily before us, and we did it again after *TC Winston* wreaked havoc across our beautiful country. We will always come through when the welfare of our people is a concern.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to highlight some concerning behaviour by the other side of the House and many unelected failed politicians before the Budget announcement. The Opposition from the very beginning, put themselves before the safety and wellbeing of Fijians. Not once did I

hear a single idea or good suggestion from the other side. From day one, they began the political attack, blaming everything on us while we worked very hard for the benefit of the Fijians.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J.N. NAND.- The Opposition was so desperate that they even threw science out of the window and tried to scare the people of Serua that the tradewinds put them at risk of COVID-19. While we laugh, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the creation of fear and panic during emergencies is not a joke. But there is more.

Honourable Professor Prasad was quoted in a *Fiji Times* article asking for a pay cut for all civil servants. When he was called out, he flatly denied it and that is on record, Mr. Speaker, Sir. But the same request was made on the NFP website and it was shared for the world to see.

Mr. Savenaca Narube was another politician who called for civil servants' pay to be cut and we knew better. We found a way, without taking into account the ridiculous suggestions by many in the Opposition. Civil servants are people too and they need protection from COVID-19, just like the rest of us, Mr. Speaker, Sir and that is such a silly suggestion and we disregarded it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was very interesting to see that after the announcement of this Budget, many had to go from left to right, and from top to bottom of the Budget, just to find if there was anything that could be criticised. It is very sneaky, Mr. Speaker, Sir. They know that COVID-19 has placed us in hard times and instead of help, they tried to make the people of Fiji worry.

They attack small parts of the Budget while conveniently ignoring many other incentives that supplement those. In many cases, such as cane payments, they completely failed to understand how it worked and started spreading fake news. Many, whom are sitting across the floor are guilty of this, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government has, once again, shown the country that it stands for people whenever the need arises. We put Fijians first. This is a true and genuine attribute of leadership in order to protect its people.

Furthermore, there is a big smile on teachers who upgraded themselves with qualifications, as they will now be remunerated better as per their new and improved qualifications.

And this does not stop here, the very same increment is going to be backdated, adding another layer of icing on the cake. As we have said before and would like to say once again, the FijiFirst Government shall continue to strive through various means to improve the quality of teachers and to remunerate those who have upgraded themselves is only one of them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, yesterday, Honourable Kepa made a lot of inaccurate claims. She had completely missed the point. All she established was that, she was misleading Parliament with false figures and claiming that students were somehow being deprived.

As a former Minister for Education, she should know better, or maybe she does not know because she could not provide free education to all Fijian children during her time. Maybe, this is why she failed in her time as a Minister. What she does seem to be good at is misleading Parliament and using innocent children as political tools.



Students will continue to receive free tuition, free textbooks and subsidised transport, such as the bus fare scheme. In short, Fijian children will continue to receive all the benefits of a free education that was promised and delivered by the FijiFirst Government.

I remind you that this is the first time in Fiji's history that such initiative has been implemented. Together with free education, free textbooks and transport assistance, we shall continue to provide quality education access to all students of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our TELS will go through some good policy changes in order to raise the qualifying standards for students at a lower cost. For starters, only students who attain marks above 250 in their Year 13 Examination will qualify.

We are also lowering TELS and Toppers Scholarships available, along with some other necessary measures and plugs. However, this shall have no impact on those who are still paying. Furthermore, to ensure that the Government support is strengthened in these trying times, the repayments will remain suspended until the end of 2021.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, throughout the pandemic, the Fijian Government has kept Fijians well informed. Through the Fijian Government *Facebook* page and other social media sites, we have ensured that hundreds of thousands of Fijians were aware of what is going around them.

From health tips to curfew times, never before have Fijians been able to access and engage with their Government. Globally, the top organisations have already begun to shift away from using third party sources to tell their stories or circulate information. With the Fiji Government page supplemented by the Ministry pages, we were able to disseminate a wide range of information across the entire Fijian audience. Again, the Honourable Attorney-General must be commended for setting up these assets to help Fijians through another spectrum.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while few critics are still scratching their heads and trying to come to terms in order to digest this bold, best and beautiful Budget, there are already celebrations amongst Fijians, which is very evident through their trademark "Bula" smile. If any one of us has sat amongst the ordinary Fijians after the announcement of the National Budget, you will impartially know what I am talking about.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, why is the Opposition and their mouthpiece, *Fiji Times*, panicking? They do not want the Fijian people to be happy, especially if the source of their happiness is the Government that they voted for. It is a simple trick really. If the Fijian Budget has 100 good benefits that supplement other benefits that have existed before, they will instead choose a single one and try to attack it, make 20 stories out of nothing. They will never say that free education, subsidised electricity and water are providing much-needed relief to Fijians. Instead, you will see poorly researched attacks and naysaying.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you would think that having failed with this strategy that lies in two Elections, Opposition and its partners would try to change things up. What is worse is the denial when they are called out. Everyone already knows what Opposition and its partners are about, denying it only makes it sad, instead of funny, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite the long-winded and poorly researched attacks that we have heard on a Budget that we knew would require reductions, the FijiFirst Government will continue working hard for our people and for all Fijian people.

Therefore, before retiring to my seat, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to put this on record, that I duly support this Budget which was delivered on 17th July, 2020, by the Honourable Minister for Economy. This Budget is the best way to revamp the Fijian economy after the COVID-19 impact, and I congratulate the Honourable Minister for Economy for this fine piece of work.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. J.N. NAND.- That was a good call. With that, I wish everyone in this august House a healthy deliberation on the 2020-2021 National Budget. May God bless Fiji and every Fijian. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Assistant Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts for his contribution to the debate, and I now call upon the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua. You have the floor, Ma'am.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- *Vinaka vakalevu*, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this Budget has, kind of, got off to a bad start. I reckon the Honourable Minister for Economy turned up late, delayed his delivery by more than an hour, he did not explain himself, did not apologise, and I just want to express my utter disgust at his behaviour.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- The big deal about the one hour, Honourable Prime Minister, is that people were waiting for your highness.

The Honourable Minister, Mr. Speaker, is a servant of Fiji's people and representatives of those people are the Members of this House. To all the people who were waiting to watch him on television, to all the people who consumed their mobile data, waiting for him to turn up, he behaved disrespectfully and arrogantly. In that, at least, he behaved in the character of some of this Government. Even the Honourable Prime Minister has had trouble turning up on time to COVID-19 briefings.

As most of us know, Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister for Economy is famous for being late to many public functions. He acts as if he is the only person with important things to do in this country. I remind him again, we pay him more than \$200,000 a year to be our servant. The people, and not him, are the important ones here. And I remind him of the old saying, "Manners maketh the man" and it is high time, he show some.

Now, I want to offer my respect and gratitude to the real leaders of our country; the many people and groups, both in Fiji and abroad, who with compassion as their only motive, have rallied, organised, collected and often times spent their own savings to reach hungry and desperate families, feed school children and help rebuild homes.

I want to thank all the faith-based organisations with the school feeding programmes, people and groups, including:

- Global Compassion;
- the Lagilagi Relief Fund;
- Nayau Strong, the owner of Foundation of the USA;

- Mr. Narayan Reddy;
- Mr. Allen Lockington and their group of friends and donors in Lautoka;
- the Kadavu-Pagopago Association;
- the volunteers at the Lami District Council of Social Services; as well as
- all the companies that have supplied their staff with groceries.

The list is long, Honourable Speaker. To them I say, “You are the real leaders; you are the people who give up your time for others; you are the people who understand who is important.”

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister’s Budget Address was interesting, both for what he said and for what he did not say. But one thing is clear, it has taken this COVID-19 crisis to show-up the stark reality of what many, including the NFP and the Opposition, have been saying all along.

This is a Government that has been reckless and wasteful. It has stubbornly refused to accept advice from anyone. It behaves as though one man knows everything. At a time when we should be encouraging local production and saving foreign exchange, the Budget encourages cheaper imports. Our local producers and manufacturers will have to fight against these cheaper imports, and it is not just tourism jobs that are disappearing, manufacturing workers’ jobs are at risk as well.

Ordinary families are struggling to put basic food on the table. What use to them are duty cuts on imported food stuff and all these gems and cars? Why reduce duty on imported vegetables when we should be driving consumption towards what our local farmers are growing in abundance? At times like this, you will see us consumers pull back our expenditure to bare necessities.

Mr. Speaker, year upon year in the Budget Address, we hear about how well the Government is doing, how much it is spending on this programme or that programme and how many people whose lives have generally improved? But this is a Government that has been big on talk and small on delivery. The Government is suspending its \$1,000 Parenthood Assistant Payment. Who could forget their pre-Election baby freebie? But now the votes are in, the freebies are out.

Mr. Speaker, did you know that since November last year, Fiji women have not been able to get a pap smear in this country. Why? It is because the laboratories do not have the filters to carry out proper tests. Why? Is it because we have not paid our bill to a certain supplier?

What is happening at the new Maternity Ward at the Colonial War Memorial (CWM) Hospital, the ground breaking ceremony for which was carried out by the Honourable Prime Minister in June, 2018? I note that the World Bank has, this year, approved funding of US\$7.4 million to further support the Government of Fiji’s strengthening of our health systems in the wake of this COVID-19 emergency. The project will provide additional medical supplies, including personal protective equipment, intensive care unit beds and ventilators as well, and this jumped out at me as well as the installation of a medical incinerator that will serve three divisional hospitals in Fiji, including the CWM.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when fire broke out at the CWM Hospital’s Boiler Room in May last year, the Hospital’s incinerator was also badly affected. Now, since then where has the Hospital waste from CWM Hospital, including from Accident and Emergency and Operating Theatres been going? God forbid, it has been going to the Naboro Landfill. Has it? Can anyone from that side of the House, hand-on-heart, say that this is not so.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Instead of trying to lure tourists to Fiji with \$60 million in tourist freebies, please, buy basic supplies for the hospitals.

Even last week, people on social media wanted to know why our hospitals could not even supply bandages. What about basic drugs and medications? We can offer 400 people to a tourist to visit Fiji but we cannot look after the basic health and dignity of our people!

I agree, Mr. Speaker, when the Honourable Minister for Economy said during his Budget Speech, and I quote, “Target resources on families facing the most severe hit to their finances”, so let us do that. How can we be allocating \$250,000 for Fiji Day Celebrations when tens of thousands of our workers and their families have nothing to celebrate?

Mr. Speaker, there are parents in this country who cannot afford to give their kids three balanced meals a day. I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that Fiji marks October 10th by calling for a week of national prayer and fasting, reflection and reconciliation. I suggest that the Government give the \$250,000 to the likes of Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS) or Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises & Development (FRIEND) or the NGOs working hard to support our people, giving support to the huge number of Fijians dealing with hunger and mental health issues as a result of unemployment and poverty.

Let us talk about education now, Honourable Speaker. For TELS, 130 new awards for the MBBS Oral and Dental will be suspended, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This has left dozens of students and their parents bitterly disappointed. After years of studying hard, earning for a TELS Award for an MBBS Programme, they are dealt this blow.

The TELS qualifying marks based on Year 13 results have been raised from 200 to 250. TELS Technical College student entry age has also been increased from 15 years to 17 years. What happened?

As for our beloved teachers, well the much-hoped for MyAPA results for Fiji’s roughly 13,000 teachers was a huge let down for them. Mr. Speaker, 98 percent of Fiji’s teachers did not qualify for a step increase and let me read a little bit of what a teacher read when he opened his MyAPA page, and I quote, “MyAPA Performance Assessment Process for 2017-2018 performance year has been finalised.

(Honourable Government Member interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- After a review of all eligibility criteria for the MY APA, it was determined that “You have met all eligibility criteria.” This teacher’s heart went ‘yes’ and then he read on:

“The moderation sub-committees met to moderate the result of all eligible employee and they carefully reviewed the evidence provided in the MY APA and considered the results reports submitted by your work unit. On conclusion of this moderation process, it was determined that you had not provided sufficient evidence in your MY APA to support a step increase. In this regard your salary band and step will remain as at present.”

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- But wait, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it gets better. To add insult to injury, teachers have been given five working days to appeal that decision, after being made to wait for more than two years. What happened?

The Honourable Minister for Education then went on to say that teachers who were qualified got paid the 2017-2018, and she also said, I quote, “2018-2019 assessments are still pending.” But as announced in the last Budget by the Honourable Attorney-General, the 2018-2019 assessment is still on hold. What happened?

Do you remember the time when the Government boasted about how senior citizens were receiving subsidised bus fares of \$40 a month? This suddenly dropped to \$20 a month, now it is going to be \$10 a month. Two nights ago, I got a call from a lady in Nadi who needs to travel from her Nadi home to the Lautoka Hospital for her eye clinic and this is a trip that she needs to make three times a month but one round trip costs \$8. For all the inconvenience that this failed policy has caused our elderly, not to mention our students, you may as well just allow travellers to choose to pay cash.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Let us talk about housing. There is no good time to remove funding assistance to the vulnerable. There is no worse time to make cuts than when the economic fall-out from the pandemic is affecting vulnerable families. It is not the middle classes and the upper classes who are hurting, Mr. Speaker, Sir, not when the duty on luxury goods is going down, it is the poorest who are paying the price in this Budget.

Removing funding for housing upgrades for persons living with disabilities will only increase the vulnerability of an already extremely marginalised and largely ignored portion of the Fijian population, including our elderly.

It will further increase the burden on women who are inevitably the carers of our sick and disabled. This means that mothers may not be able to go and earn an income, daughters may not be able to attend school. This will directly strike at a family’s ability to meet everyday needs. It will reduce women’s access to employment and education.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 91 percent of Fijians with disabilities require structural modification to improve their homes and living environment. The severity of impairment increased exponentially without such improvements to their house being made, to the point that people can die because of difficulties that could easily be mitigated with home improvements.

Sir, 13.7 percent of all Fijians live with a disability. This does not include the elderly or the three amputees per day due to diabetes. All amputees will require some form of modification to their home for them to be able to live with some dignity.

The loss of this funding to Habitat for Humanity will mean that persons with disabilities may have to wait five to seven years to get assistance from private benefactors. Many may not get any assistance at all.

Let me turn our attention, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to the Tropical Cyclone Harold Relief. Let me tell you about this brand of tinned fish (showing can of tinned fish), which was part of Government’s

Tropical Cyclone Harold Relief to Kadavu. The Honourable Prime Minister himself, I believe, took this to Kadavu.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I invite everyone in this House to open a can of this and take a whiff of the contents. Do it and tell me if you would give this to your own family. I invite all those who have not can come up to the Opposition Chambers, I have opened this and it is sitting there in the fridge and it is marked, "Do not eat."

Our people deserve a better leader and one who goes to rural communities, handing out substandard food, bottles of oil which already have been opened, all the while asking communities if Honourable Rasova has been to visit them and chastising them for not voting for him. This is from our Honourable Prime Minister.

On 20th June, 2018, Mr. Speaker, the Malaysian Ministry of Health banned this very brand, took them off supermarket shelves. Why? Because this tinned fish had been found to contain roundworms. And yet, this is what our Government gave to people in Kadavu and God knows where else?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when times are good, you will always find Government Ministers taking credit. The Honourable Minister for Economy was always photographed at the Fiji Airways, handing out bonus cheques. But when it came to making Fiji Airways staff redundant, he and the rest of the Government were nowhere to be seen.

This was also true of the Fiji Airways Executive Team, sitting high up there in their air conditioned Executive Suite, they terminated people by e-mail. They did not follow the collective agreements with the Unions. They did not offer solace, empathy or support. Good leaders would face their employees and explain the problem, but as soon as the tough gets going, they get going too. These Executives and our Ministers were nowhere to be seen.

Let us not forget our Government's shocking and dishonest treatment of Patient No. 1. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is how this Government treats the workers, who have been the face of this country to the world. I know this Government does not like to hear what we, on this side, have to say, no matter what we say.

Perhaps, they should read the numerous letters published in the dailies, and here is an excerpt, a letter from a gentleman by the name of Mr. Chand and he wrote, and I quote:

"May I add to this list the issues of governance, transparency and trust. The countries that have been most successfully in dealing with the pandemic are those that seem accountable, practise transparency and they are trusted by their citizens. This is achieved through accurate flow of information, robust data, timely response to issues raised by the people and their inclusivity and participation in decision-making processes.

I believe in Fiji we have a long way to go where the citizens feel comfortable about the information provided. Unless the authorities can be more humble and inclusive in their approach to deal with the social, economic and environmental issues that we are going to face for many months yet, I am afraid the ability to deal with the immense impacts will remain wanting.

Mr. Altaf Chand."

Not long ago, the Honourable Minister for Economy complained about why only 50,000 people had downloaded the careFiji App. Let me tell him about the people who have not done it. Half of them, Mr. Speaker, Sir, do not trust this Government, the other half are just so sick and tired of being dropped down to bullied, patronised and ordered around by this Government that they just simply refuse. They do it as an act of rebellion, because that is where the FijiFirst Party leadership has taken us. It has taken us to the point where people do not trust the Government and will not work with it.

This is the ultimate failure of political leadership. Can we the people trust this Government? No! I have this suspicion, Mr. Speaker, that this Government reckons, if you keep the people poor enough, you keep them desperate enough to swallow any bait you throw their way before the next elections.

This Budget reminds me of a 1978 song by Johnny Mathis and Deniece Williams, “Too much, too little, too late.” Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not support this Budget and I, and many others, are sick of the dishonesty and deceit by many of those promoting it. And I am reminded of a day in 1653 in England when Oliver Cromwell gave a speech, dismissing a parliament that have grown corrupt and lazy, and this is what he said, I quote:

“It is high time for me to put an end to your sitting in this place, which you have dishonoured by your contempt of all virtue and defiled by your practice of every vice.

You are a factious crew and enemies to all good government.

You are grown intolerably odious to the whole nation. You were deputed here by the people to get grievances redressed, are yourselves become the greatest grievance.”

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua for her contribution to the debate.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Assistant Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament; I am honoured to address this august House and contribute to the 2020-2021 National Budget Debate.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management has been allocated \$16.6 million for the new financial year. This is apportioned for rural development programmes, as well as national disaster management operations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have observed in the past nine months since the commencement of the cyclone period in November 2019 how the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) and the Divisional Commissioners’ Offices have worked tirelessly through the various disasters that our beloved country had encountered. The COVID-19 pandemic was obviously the test of our resilience in responding to the different forms of disasters.

We acknowledge the great efforts put in by the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and our security forces in working with the Ministry's Team on the ground in the identification and preparation of isolation facilities for quarantine purposes. Their assistance in the mobilisation of resources for contact tracing and policing of the community ensured that the disease was contained within the localities of those who were affected.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not need to elaborate that Fiji is very vulnerable to natural disasters, but allow me to enlighten this House on the cost of the damages caused by severe tropical cyclones in the last 10 years:

- In 2010, *TC Tomas*'s total damage and losses was valued at approximately \$84.3 million, representing 1.4 percent of the GDP with one casualty.
- In 2012, *TC Evans*'s total damage and losses was valued at approximately \$194.9 million, representing 2.74 percent of GDP.
- In 2016, *TC Winston*'s total damage and losses was valued at approximately \$199.9 million, representing 19.35 percent of GDP with 44 casualties.
- In 2018, *TC Gita*'s total damage and losses was valued at approximately \$1.2 million, representing 0.012 percent of GDP, with no casualty, followed by *TC Keni* with a total damage and loss valued at approximately \$1.2 million, representing 0.028 percent of GDP with two casualties.
- In 2019, *TC Sarai*'s total damage and losses was valued at approximately \$10.3 million, representing 0.09 percent of GDP with two casualties.
- In 2020, *TC Tino*'s total damage and losses was valued at approximately \$3.2 million, representing 0.03 percent of GDP with two casualties and *TC Harold* recording approximately \$100 million in damage and losses, representing 0.9 percent of GDP with one casualty.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the total damage and losses recorded in Fiji in the past 10 years were valued at \$2.42 billion. Having said that, I must highlight at the outset that the focus of the Ministry is to coordinate Government efforts in building resilient and sustainable communities.

Mr. Speaker Sir, my Ministry acknowledged that \$0.8 million has been allocated to the Prime Minister's Relief and Rehabilitation Fund, to ensure that disaster relief and response activities are provided to affected communities during disasters. This funding mechanism has been very effective in past disasters, as it provides funding for immediate response during the onset of any disaster.

We are not disheartened with this amount which may seem relatively small, compared to the damage costs of disasters, as it goes without saying that reprioritisation is part of the process when disasters do happen. We are also comforted by the fact that our friends and partners in disaster management have proven their support to the Ministry, as they are always ready to open their heart during the period of disaster. Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry will continue with its awareness programme for disaster preparedness and risk reduction.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Natural Disaster Management Act 1998 is still being used as a guide for the Ministry in disaster management operations and to ensure Government aligns to its global commitments, especially the Paris Agreement on Climate Change 2015, Sustainable Development Agenda 2015-2030 and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.



Mr. Speaker, Sir, in order to align with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Ministry is now implementing the National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy (NDRRP). This implementation entails Fiji's achievement on Target E of the Sendai Framework, which focusses on national and local strategies by 2030.

The NDMO has been allocated \$30,000 to continue consultations with stakeholders in the implementation and mainstreaming of the 122 action activities that dovetails the new era of NDMO's operations. These action activities will spearhead Government Ministries' response to DRR and showcase to the rest of the world that Fiji is taking proactive approaches towards disaster management.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, last year, the Honourable Prime Minister launched the NDRRP, which was followed by two national consultations conducted by NDMO. With the support from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Australia through the Fiji Programme Support Facility, the NDMO has also completed the Central and Western Divisions sub-national workshops, while the Northern and Eastern Divisions are planned for September this year. The Ministry will ensure that not only are our decisions risk-informed, but also engage with our communities about the different roles they play as outlined in the NDRRP.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the NDMO, in collaboration with Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA), is piloting the Disaster Risk Reduction Municipal Plan (DRRMP) in Nadi Town and is also providing technical assistance in the form of a DRR Advisor. This project was earmarked to begin early this year, however, this has been delayed due to COVID-19.

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 is designed to support the reduction of existing level of risks and prevent new risks from emerging.

The NDMO has been allocated \$20,000 to develop a National Disaster Database which will enable to collation of hazard data and past disaster data for the formulation of risk and hazard impact modelling. The database will allow the NDMO to develop risk assessment methodologies and the storage of damage assessment data from past and future disasters. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we support the initiative of working smart launched by the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, and the database will ensure that we abreast ourselves to the modern means of analysing crisis and implementing evidence-based science-driven decision-making tools.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while we have funding for training and awareness activities, we would like to acknowledge our international donor partners, namely; the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Australia, JICA, USAid and the International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC), who have come in to not only assist the implementation of the NDRRP, but also help the development of a Community Based Risk Reduction Policy.

Community-based disaster preparedness activities will play a critical role in developing communities' adaptive capacity and resilience to disasters. The Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction Training Manual is currently being piloted in selected vulnerable communities in the Eastern and Central Divisions, and it has been developed in partnership with the Partners in Community Development Fiji (PCDF).

To-date, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have conducted Community Based Risk Reduction Management Training in 350 communities and this year, with the support of our partners - Live and Learn, we will conduct nine Work in Emergency Operation Centres (WEOC) training for our civil servants in nine districts across Fiji. These nine districts are Nadroga, Taveuni, Savusavu, Seaqaqa,

Labasa, Rotuma, Saqani and Tukavesi. The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) has been allocated \$8,000 for such trainings as mandated in the National Disaster Management Act 1998.

The development of this manual will highlight recommendations from lessons learnt during *TC Winston*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$15,000 has been allocated towards the awareness programme. The NDMO plans to hold a National Disaster Awareness Week in Yasawa this year, given that the Yasawa Group of Islands is prone to the impact of tropical cyclones, storm surges and climate change. This exposure will surely empower the communities to become resilient.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government has continued funding for the maintenance of flood early warning systems which are essential for communities living in flood-prone areas of Nadi, Lautoka, Tavua, Ba and Sigatoka. A total of \$10,000 has been allocated for this purpose.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition, \$10,000 is provided to assist the NDMO in carrying out disaster management services. A lesson learnt from *TC Winston* was the formulation of the Fiji Cluster System, which was adopted from the UN Cluster System framework and localised into the Fiji context.

The Fiji Cluster system is a Government-led humanitarian coordination mechanism. It operates at the national strategic level throughout the disaster risk management cycle. It is also a link to the sub-national level humanitarian coordination mechanism led by Divisional Commissioners. Each sectoral Cluster is led by the Permanent Secretary of an appropriate Ministry, who will be supported by a Cluster Secretariat to coordinate humanitarian actors within the sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is widely known that the context of disaster is evolving, as such, the up-skilling of our Disaster Liaison Officers (DSLOs) is also vital. With the support of the Australian Government through Register of Engineers for Disaster Relief (REDR), a series of training will be done on humanitarian work and cluster support.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a total of \$80,000 has been allocated for the development of a robust emergency communication system. The NDMO is partnering with JICA, in the setup of this resilient and multi-hazard early warning system. This will include the establishment of new tsunami sirens in populated coastal communities along the Lami–Lautoka corridor, and selected maritime islands in the Western Division. Further to this, we are also working with Ministry of Communications through our Fiji Cluster System to identify blackspot areas within the country where further support will be provided to ensure communications are not affected during disasters.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, additional support from JICA includes the installation of the 9 HF radios this year in the blackspot areas of Vanua Levu and we envision it to cover the remaining parts of Fiji in the near future. A total of \$30,000 has been allocated for the maintenance of emergency equipment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) has been a vital active partner and provided funding support to a number of NDMO initiatives. Worth mentioning is the support rendered through the procurement of tsunami sirens within the Suva Peninsular and the Technical Advisors who currently sit within the NDMO.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the NDMO is looking at completing the review of the Natural Disaster Management Act 1998 towards the end of this year and also the formulation of disaster regulations and plans to operationalise the Disaster Act. Other initiatives include the formulation of a Disaster

Risk Assessment Guideline to be used by our development partners and the continued upgrade of disaster communication networks and tsunami early warning systems.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government continues to be strong advocate for community resilience, which will contribute towards sustainable livelihood and in this pressing time of COVID-19, we have become robust educators of leaving no one behind.

With those, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend the Honourable Minister for Economy and his team for the bold and resilient Budget which I wholeheartedly support. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Assistant Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management for his contribution to the debate.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to this current year Budget from 1st August, 2020 to 31st July, 2021.

The Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers of Government and fellow Parliamentarians, much has been said in the last two days on the Budget that we have been presented with on 17th July this year.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to endorse the response of the Honourable Leader of the Opposition that was delivered yesterday and that of my colleagues yesterday and today. We agree that this Budget may be defined as a well-framed, thought-out, theoretical, deceiving Budget, a Budget to save face in a crisis situation. It is an irresponsible, rudderless and deceitful Budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is, again, a vague attempt at face-saving because economic indicators clearly showed a depressed growth rate, well before the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rather than helping those in need of assistance and a hand-up, this Government puts their selfish need to continue to build roads and monuments to prove their greatness. This need to borrow, borrow and borrow is selfishly made at the expense of families, in particular those who lived below the poverty line, Sir, and those who struggle on the margins of poverty and the families who face hardship as a result of losing their jobs due to the effects of COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in face of adversity or crisis, facts and truth matters most. We must unite as a nation, trust each other and work together to lift our nation out of this crisis. As we were reminded yesterday by Honourable Kuridrani, when the Government gives facts and figures, trust goes up.

Conversely, lies that try to paint a picture that is different from the harsh reality they face, reduce the people's trust and confidence. And distrust and lack of faith is corrosive and damaging to the nation, Sir. When Government is truthful there is a boost in confidence in the people by investors and the whole of the nation.

That is why I am particularly disappointed, Mr. Speaker, with the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade and Tourism and Transport, who tried to portray this side of the House as anachronistic or anachronism. The people of Fiji are well aware of how the FijiFirst Government continues to blame past Governments for the crisis the nation faces now. The people knew that there was no boom because if there was, Mr. Speaker, the nation would not be in such dire straits.

The Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade and Tourism and Transport also announced a creative economic modelling that results in an average GDP growth of 3.2 percent claimed by the Bainimarama-led Government. The truth is, Mr. Speaker, that in economics as in anything, one must compare apples with apples and not try to compare apples and oranges.

The truth, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that, the average economic growth of 3.2 percent is achieved if you track the growth rates for the years 2010 to 2019. However, if one compares the growth rates of 2011 to 2020, it is 0.75 percent. So it is obvious that the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade and Tourism and Transport does not want to account for the projected growth rate for 2020, which the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) predicted in their June 2020 monthly economic update.

The truth, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade and Tourism and Transport and the FijiFirst Government do not want to take ownership and responsibility for the projected negative 21.7 percent growth for this year.

Any student crunching the figures will see that for the years 2011 to 2020, the average economic growth is, in fact, 0.75 percent and the Honourable Leader of the Opposition deserves an apology and retraction from the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade and Tourism and Transport for accusing the Honourable Leader of the Opposition for fabricating figures and manipulating facts.

I would also advise the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade and Tourism and Transport to check the speech of the Honourable Leader of the Opposition before making such wild allegations. It is obvious that the Honourable Minister does not want to account or take credit for the 2020 economic contraction, Sir.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for allowing me to also address the matter that Honourable Maharaj said yesterday regarding the Honourable Turaga na Tui Namosi's contribution. The Honourable Ratu Matanitobua commented on the allocation for overseas sports tournament, Sir. Perhaps, like the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade and Tourism and Transport, Honourable Maharaj should listen closely or ask Honourable Members for their speeches before they make allegations.

May I refer Honourable Maharaj to page 1232 of yesterday's *Daily Hansard*. The Honourable Matanitobua stated, and I quote:

“Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also acknowledge the \$1 million allocation for Overseas Sports Tournament. How realistic is this allocation, taking into account that our borders are still closed? This, Sir, is another inappropriate allocation that could have been reduced so that resources can be adequately redirected within the Ministry.”

That was what the Honourable Ratu Matanitobua said.

You will appreciate, Mr. Speaker Sir, that contrary to Honourable Maharaj's attempt to denigrate Honourable Matanitobua, in fact, the official record in the *Daily Hansard* will show that the Honourable Matanitobua asked why was the allocation needed at all when the international borders and sporting fixtures were not happening. So, why \$1 million for overseas sporting tournaments?

Thank you, Honourable Maharaj. Please, listen closely before making wild allegations or perhaps, I can refer you and the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade and Tourism and Transport to a hearing specialist.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Members from the other side have also made comments in regards to the collapse of the National Bank of Fiji (NBF). This is not the first time that Honourable Government Members have brought up the NBF saga in this august House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition has made it very clear in this august House and in public statements on the failure of the NBF. As a leader, he took the full responsibility because he was the Prime Minister. He took the bull by the horns, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

There are laws covering independent constitutional offices and their respective functional responsibilities. Their independence is safeguarded constitutionally to ensure central government does not interfere with their legal mandate. One of these independent institutions is the RBF which is responsible for the management of our foreign reserves, manage inflation and to independently monitor the operations of financial institutions. It is sad to note that the independence of such institutions have been marginalised by the Bainimarama-led Government over the last 14 years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the problem with the NBF did not only occur during the SVT period of leadership, but the Honourable Leader of the Opposition has confirmed that there are no excuses. He said that it was an ongoing problem before he became the Prime Minister.

A fair share of the Bank's portfolio was concentrated on a few big businesses. When the problem was brought to his attention, he acted swiftly to minimise any further risk. He did not shy away because the savings of the citizens of Fiji were at risk. People responsible were taken to task and some people have served jail sentences. The Honourable Member should get the facts right and put the issue in its proper context.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, much has been said on the effects of the Budget, in particular to the grassroots people of the nation. There is also an ongoing problem in the continuing use of drugs in our villages and in our communities. That is a problem that also needs to be addressed.

I would like to suggest, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the Ministry of Communications budget for this coming year under Head 16-2(7) for digitalFIJI which is \$8 million or almost \$9 million, that there is a programme that is being organised and managed by the International Youth Group in Fiji which has also received recognition by Government. There has been a number of MOUs signed by one or two Ministries in the Government.

This is the group that is taking out the mind lectures to prisoners and to communities that have requested for it. That lecture tries to change the mindset of people, in particular, those who continue to take drugs, the criminals, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

They change the mindset through lectures that are based on biblical principles. This is something that needs to be taken to our communities. If we are going to arrest and reduce the continuing use of drugs by our people in our own villages and communities, we need to take up a programme that will help arrest the problem and will also help them to change their mindset and move away from drugs, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The other issue that I would like to address, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I had raised this in my Budget contribution in 2019 is the matter regarding the Turaga ni Koro allowance and the Nasi ni

Koro allowance. It is time that Government recognise the enormous contribution of the Turaga ni Koro in the role that they are expected to carry out for Government, for NGOs and for the members of the village. They are receiving \$100 per month, whilst the Nasi ni Koro are receiving \$200, and not only the Nasi ni Koro, the other community nurses in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I ask here that consideration be given to increasing their allowances. I heard today that the FNPF should also be paid for the Turaga ni Koro. Some of these Turaga ni Koros serve as long as more than 20 years. When they retire, there is nothing else to help them cope with their retirement years.

The other matter that I would like to address, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the need for a human-face budget. We hear of the large sums of money that have been allocated for this programme and other programmes, et cetera. There is an absence of a policy package that will ensure that our people actually benefit from all these money that have been allocated to the various Ministries. For example, the Ministry of Agriculture.

There should be policies in introducing mechanisation for our farmers in our villages and rural communities. I would like to suggest an allocation to buy diggers for each *tikina* or each community. This will help the farmers to improve their farming plans, get lots of crops and that will increase the export or the foreign earnings that is needed for our country.

That would be a major boost, Sir, if policy packages and policies are devised to ensure that the amounts of money that are being allocated to the Ministry actually are effectively used by the disadvantaged people in our society. They have used the *mataiva* (garden fork) and the *i sivi* (garden spade) for many, many years. It is time that they go into mechanised farming.

We know and I also recognise the programme that has been managed by the Ministry of Agriculture, where the diggers are being hired out, but there are only about one, two or three per Division. There is not enough to ensure that all farmers get to use and get to be assisted in their farming.

Some of our people who have been laid off from their employment and have been relocated to their villages are also joining the villagers in farming, and the availability of diggers and other planting equipment will also help to improve their planting productivities, as well as increasing the exports that Fiji is very much in need of, in order to increase the foreign earnings in our country, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I think I will end my address there. All that I have said is clear that I cannot support the Budget before the House. There is much needs to be done, we need a human face, we need policies that will ensure that our people actually benefit from the Budget. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi for her contribution to the debate.

Honourable Members, we will suspend proceedings for lunch and we will resume in an hour's time.

The Parliament adjourned at 1.00 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.05 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will continue with the debate on the Budget and I now call upon the Honourable Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister; the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications; Honourable Cabinet Ministers; the Honourable Leader of the Opposition; Honourable Assistant Ministers; Honourable Members of Parliament and members of the public who are watching this proceeding from their workplaces or the comfort of their homes; a very good afternoon to you all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, although I have prepared my speech on the motion before the House, I was taken aback yesterday with the comments from the Honourable Leader of the Opposition as stated on page 1131 of the Daily Hansard, in his remarks he said, and I quote:

“God forbid any further infection in our country. Our healthcare system, and I say it again, is not in a sound state. Thanks to FijiFirst Government’s misrule for the last 14 years.”

Hearing that yesterday, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was taken aback and so this afternoon, I am deviating from my actual speech and I wish to bring to the notice of this august House and the public at large who are listening to this proceedings, to be up to speed with facts of the Ministry of Health over the last 10 years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on service delivery - expanding our service reach and coverage; the establishment of new specialist services, over the following years of specialist training in Fiji through the Fiji National University (FNU) and abroad, Fijian medical specialists have come back to set up specialist services in the Ministry. These are:

- Urology;
- Neurosurgery;
- Plastic Surgery ;
- Paediatric Surgery ;
- Nephrology;
- Invasive Cardiology;
- Medical Oncology;
- Neonatology;
- Paediatric Cardiology; and
- Emergency Medicine.

Many of these high-end complex specialist medical services did not exist in Fiji before 2012 and the Ministry used to send Fijians to overseas hospitals for expert treatment. These treatments would take hours and costs thousands of dollars. Now, well-trained and competent local medical specialists provide these services in Fiji and this means, significant savings in transportation, living expenses and emotional pressures from being away in a foreign land for specialist treatment.

The Government also established a new Cardiology Centre at the CWM Hospital and replaced the Cath Lab machine with a newer model, with the assistance of the Rotary Club and long term visiting specialist cardiologists from Australia.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, outreach visits are now conducted at the Sub-Divisional Hospitals and the maritime islands by specialists from the main hospitals in increased frequency. This means, we are taking the best specialist teams from CWM Hospital, Labasa and Lautoka Hospitals to the rural areas.

The *MV Veivueti*, the hospital ship, has also enabled the Ministry to roll out specialist health services to the maritime communities. This is a significant step in ensuring no one is left behind. The outreaches have become an integral part of the Ministry's annual programme with dedicated funding and are planned to ensure that communities in hard to reach places have increased access to specialist services offered at our major hospitals.

The Mobile Eye Clinic (MEC) of the Pacific Eye Institute and Eye Department at the CWM Hospital take specialist eye services including eye surgeries to the communities and rural centres every month for better access to specialist eye care for our rural population.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's Emergency Medical Assistance Team better known as FEMAT, which is the first team in the Pacific Islands to be certified by World Health Organisation (WHO) as a Level 1 field hospital capacity for international deployment. FEMAT achieved WHO accreditation in May 2019. It visits maritime and rural health facilities, bringing specialist services closer to the community. We have conducted specialist services in Korovou, Northern Division, Lau, Yasawa and Kadavu.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, purchase and commissioning of the hospital ship, *MV Veivueti*, which is working together with the relevant Government agency and the first ever hospital ship for Fiji was constructed and delivered to Fiji. The ship was designed according to our need and outfitted to our specification and has surgical operational capability, as well as the ability to transport our medical and FEMAT teams to target sites that require these services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on Community Health Workers (CHW), the Ministry has strengthened the CHW Programme in Fiji and now employs 1,656 Community Health Workers throughout the nation. The CHW assist in delivering key health messages, monitoring community health and referring residents to essential health services, especially in villages, communities and settlements. There were five CHW trainings conducted for the CHW workers in the three Divisions last year.

Decentralisation of General Outpatient Services from major hospitals to the major health centres in the subdivisions has resulted in improving accessibility. This supports universal health coverage, which is a key component of our health strategy.

The CWM Hospital has outsourced General Outpatient Services to the Lami Health Centre, Samabula Health Centre, Valelevu Health Centre, as well as Raiwaqa Health Centre, while extending opening hours in targetted facilities. Valelevu Health Centre now opens 24/7.

Lautoka Hospital has decentralised the GOPD services to the newly established Kamikamica Health Centre and Punjas Health Centre in the suburban areas of Lautoka City. Processes for the decentralisation of GOPD services from Labasa Hospital have also been initiated.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the decentralisation of specialist clinic services is a programme that the Ministry is embarking on, to increase access for our communities to specialist service provided in the main hospitals. As an example, maternal health services have been decentralised from the CWM Hospital Maternity Unit to the newly-built Makoi Maternity Unit. Similarly, the Dental Prosthetic Services from CWM Hospital have been decentralised to the newly-built Nakasi Health Centre in Nakasi, Nasinu.



The establishment of the Nadera Dialysis Unit follows the same concept of moving specialist services closer to where the community lives. The rolling out of the Emergency Department services from CWM Hospital to Valelevu and Nausori Health Centre is also another initiative.

Mental health services have also decentralised its services through the establishment of stress management wards at the main hospitals (Lautoka, Labasa and CWM Hospitals) thereby, increasing the number of mental health facilities and in-patient beds from where mental health services can be provided.

On specialist visits, this is another model of decentralising specialist services where medical specialists undertake regular, weekly and monthly visits to Health Centres and Sub-Divisional Hospitals. The CWM Hospital and Lautoka and Labasa Hospitals are currently undertaking this activity. Subspecialist monthly clinics are conducted at the Divisional Hospitals and Sub-Divisional Hospitals in the West and the North by subspecialists (Urologist, Paediatric Surgeon, Plastic Surgeon, Neurology and Neurosurgeon) from the CWM Hospital.

New specialised medical equipment introduced, such as MRI Scan, EEG machine, ECHO machine, liquid-based cytology machine, lithotripter machine, et cetera, introduced to support expansion in our services. The MRI machine is the first one in the South Pacific. A 3.5 Tessler machine valued at \$2.7 million was purchased and installed at the CWM Hospital.

On the CT scan machine, the purchase of three CT scan machines with the Lautoka and Labasa Hospitals having CT scan machines for the first time ever. The CWM Hospital received a 128-slice machine, the first such high capability CT machine of its kind in the South Pacific. This machine has greatly helped the treatment, recovery and final outcome for many patients.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the lithotripter machine is the first of its kind in the Pacific that ensures that the treatment of kidney stones are improved. Many patients that used to require open surgical procedures for their kidney stones are now treated without requiring to undergo a surgical operation or admitted for long periods of time at the hospital.

The liquid-based cytology machine is the first of its kind in Fiji and was purchased to increase the volume and timeliness of diagnosis for cancers, which is now the third most common cause of mortality in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the new hyperbaric chamber was purchased in 2019 to replace the smaller old machine at the CWM Hospital. The brand new custom-made chamber is the only machine available in Fiji which was installed in December of last year.

On overseas medical treatment support, Government subsidises overseas treatment of specialist services needed by patients and the Overseas Medical Treatment Guidelines have been reviewed to streamline these processes.

On Dialysis Services, Government has started the haemodialysis for acute kidney disease at the CWM Hospital and Lautoka Hospital to support the severely ill patients under ICU care. The Government also worked with the Board of Visitors and management of Labasa Hospital to set up the Kidney Dialysis Centre in 2014 that provides haemodialysis for acute and chronic patients. The National Kidney Dialysis and Research Centre is scheduled to be fully operational from November 2020 for patients of the greater Suva-Nausori area.

The Government has also approved and set aside a budgetary allocation for subsidising dialysis costs for patients in the low income status. This subsidy is already in use for the kidney patients in Labasa and will soon commence in Suva.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 157 call line Customer Care Facility was established to improve the health service provision, focussing on quality and patient safety. As a feedback result, the queue management system was implemented at Valelevu Health Centre to improve patient waiting time. Since the commencement of the 157 Customer Care facility, the number of complaints and the feedback timeframe has steadily improved.

The Ministry has established a set of systematic criterion-based audits of facility standards and adherence to clinical guidelines to guide a continuous quality improvement process. The Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) and the Safe Motherhood Hospital Initiative (SMHI) have been adopted with WHO support and implemented throughout the Ministry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the establishment of twinning hospitals has allowed the Ministry to improve its care and management of children with cancer. The twinning programme between CWM Hospital and the Christchurch General Hospital has resulted in remarkable improvements in the treatment, ongoing care and the outcome for children with cancer.

Preventative Programme Delivery - a targeted approach, Mr. Speaker, Sir. On wellness, the adoption and implementation of the WHO Package of Essential Non-Communicable Disease Interventions (PEN) Package Model to combat diabetes and other NCDs. PEN is also being implemented through the Surgical Out Patient Department (SOPDs) at health centres to improve the quality of care of NCDs in primary care facilities.

The Ministry has launched the Mobile Eye Clinic, NCD Wellness Bus and the Rheumatic Heart Disease Mobile Clinic for outreach programmes in the rural and remote areas.

The Ministry has multi-disciplinary school health teams that conduct screening for primary school children to promote healthy living.

The Ministry has been working with the Ministry of Education to roll out the Health Promoting Schools Package to over 200 schools considered to be at the highest risk category.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on maternal and child health, the Ministry also developed guidelines and policies, such as the Cervical Cancer Policy, Violence Against Women and Girls Clinical Guidelines for Health Care Workers in Fiji, School Health Policy and the Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition Guideline for Fiji.

The Ministry launched the Sexual and Reproductive Health Manual to address reproductive health issues.

The Maternal and Newborn Safe Hospital Initiative (MNSHI) audit has shown improvements in the standard of our maternal and newborn services in our hospitals.

The Ministry conducted nationwide mass measles rubella vaccination campaigns for children aged one year to 11 years in 2017, and Meningococcal C Disease Campaign targeting children aged one year to 19 years in 2018.

On Communicable Disease, the implementation of the National 'Fight the Bite' Clean Up Campaign was conducted nationwide in collaboration with Government organisations, NGOs,

corporate bodies, faith-based organisations and community groups to combat the spread of dengue fever in the country.

The use of new technology in Tuberculosis (TB) laboratories (Gene Xpert, BDMGIT) has contributed to identifying bacteriologically confirmed cases, both pulmonary and extra-pulmonary cases. The Gene Xpert machine is the first ever machine to be installed in the country and it has significantly improved the accuracy and timelines of diagnosis of TB in Fiji.

The implementation of the Early Warning and Alert Response System (EWARS) at sentinel sites in Fiji was introduced to provide better surveillance of infectious diseases, in addition to the routinely reported notifiable disease. The EWARS and Event-Based System (EBS) has resulted in greater collaboration and sharing of information between private and public health providers, giving more coverage and accuracy to the surveillance results.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Wolbachia Project in collaboration with the World Mosquito Programme to combat mosquito-borne diseases, such as dengue, *zika*, *chikungunya* and yellow fever.

The roll out of new HIV Rapid Confirmatory testing sites algorithm with the capacity to report online in collaboration with the hub centres.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the measles outbreak was declared in November 2019 and more than 300,000 Fijians in the target group were immunised against measles during the campaign. The outbreak was brought to an end through a massive response effort by the Ministry just before celebration of Christmas in 2019.

Coronavirus is in the Ministerial Statement by the Honourable Minister for Health later on.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on Health System Improvements, the enhanced health information management system to guide decisions about health sector strategy, functioning and oversight include the:

- Upgrade of Patient Information System, introduction of new Health Information System, such as Consolidated Monthly Return Information System (CMRIS), Public Health Information System (PHIS), Laboratory Management Information System (LMIS), Rheumatic Fever Information System (RFIS), Human Resources Information System (HRIS) and Surveillance Outbreak Response Management and Analysis System (SORMAS).
- Integration of the pregnancy and birth module of the Patient Information System with the Births, Deaths and Marriages Office (BDMO), to allow online registration of birth notification.

On infrastructure, we have built new hospitals, health centres and nursing stations namely the; Navua, Ba, Vatukarasa, Cuvu, Nakasi and Waimaro Health Centres; Nayavuire and Tamasua Nursing Stations and the low risk Makoi Maternity Hospital. The CWM Hospital will be extended with a new 200-bed maternity wing that will feature modern maternal health services for our mothers.

On human resources, the Ministry has fully and successfully introduced the Open Merit Based Recruitment System (OMRS), achieving a score of about 92.5 percent in its last audit. The Ministry has identified the skills required and undertaken re-engagement of retired nurses in scarce skilled areas, recruitment of specialist medical officers from overseas and locum arrangements to support the health sector.

There has been a review of nursing and medical officer posts to meet the patient demand.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which is awaiting Cabinet approval between the Ministry of Health and Medical Services (Fiji) and Health Directorate Australian Capital Territory (ACT) includes the arrangement for placement of registered Fiji nurses in ACT public health facilities to undertake further education in the area of critical care nursing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, I look forward to continue working together with the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services, the entire Ministry staff and allied workers in taking forward the Ministry's vision of developing a healthy and productive population.

With that contribution, I fully support the 2020-2021 Budget and I thank you most sincerely, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services for his contribution to the debate.

I now give the floor to the Assistant Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Minister for Economy, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Members of Parliament; I wish to address some issues raised by Honourable Qereqeretabua.

The Honourable Member or whichever lawyer wrote her speech seems to have something very personal against the Honourable Attorney-General. Perhaps the former beauty queen does not quite understand how difficult drafting a National Budget is. Even up until the last minute, the hardworking budget team is working non-stop to ensure that everything is correct. I would rather wait one hour and get the best budget than try to rush such a thing.

Let me remind the Honourable Member that the NFP's Manifesto was the most colossal failure of a document which consisted of wrong statistics, misinformation, grammatical errors, unrealistic promises and was rejected by the Fijian people. The NFP Manifesto and the team who drafted it perhaps, used Honourable Qereqeretabua's method, thus ensuring NFP became the minority Party with three seats. We, at FijiFirst, do not try to fool the Fijian people, so perhaps NFP is not used to this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the Honourable Qereqeretabua where her manners were when she cursed our children earlier this year? She is absolutely right, in that, manners maketh man, and her act of cursing innocent children including those who are yet to be born tells us what she is made of. Honourable Qereqeretabua questioned whether the Honourable Attorney-General was a true leader and a servant of the people. Let me try to make this misguided Member understand reality.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while Honourable Qereqeretabua was posting pictures on her *Facebook* page, the Honourable Attorney-General was up until the early hours of the morning with his team drafting a very big and complicated Budget for weeks and weeks. The Honourable Attorney-General was sacrificing his personal time and sleep to go out on the ground and talk to Fijians, while Honourable Qereqeretabua was posting pictures of birthday cakes on her page.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Qereqeretabua shared COVID-19 to personal things with her family and there is nothing wrong with that, but do not try to come near and suggest that the Honourable Attorney-General is not a servant of the people when he has done more for the country

in the last two months than what Honourable Qereqeretabua has done in her entire life. Honourable Qereqeretabua needs to understand that every little effort counts. She named all the groups and people helping others and instead of using this positively to spread good feelings, she used their work to attack FijiFirst.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is disgusting behaviour to politicise providing aid and help and to suggest that some people are better than others, when everyone is helping the best they can. I rise as the Honourable Assistant Minister for Agriculture to voice my contribution to the 2020-2021 National Budget designed to provide hope to every Fijian and the economy. I join the Honourable Members who have spoken before me in commending the Honourable Minister for Economy and his team for a bold and innovative 2020-2021 National Budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully support the intentions of the 2020-2021 National Budget in dealing with the current certainties of the COVID-19 pandemic and its far-reaching economic impact to all the Fijian families. This is unprecedented times and as a nation, we must act decisively by taking bold steps, aimed at the recovery of the Fijian economy from this global health crisis.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to summarise the 2020-2021 National Budget in four words, it would be “bold”, “visionary”, “hopeful” and “caring”. This Budget empowers our commercial sector, the engine of growth by providing economic stimulus packages to incentivise entrepreneurs and employers and protect our economy during these uncertain times.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through the 2020-2021 National Budget, the Ministry of Agriculture will continue to expand its planned activities. We will continue on our momentum in accelerating our transition from subsistence farming to commercial agriculture in the next financial year. Instead, the Ministry of Agriculture allocation will only motivate us to work smartly and diligently to leverage the agriculture sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry’s strategic policy direction is clear, as set out in the Ministry’s five-year Strategic Development Plan (SDP) 2019-2023. It is about accelerating the growth of this important sector through commercialisation. We have already started this work and we will continue to do so. The SDP is aligned to the 20-year National Development Plan (NDP) and builds on the modernisation set out in the Fiji Agriculture 2020 Policy Agenda.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the two Ministry of Agriculture policy documents were designed to fulfil the mandated-policy objectives of the Ministry in:

- maintaining food and nutrition security;
- generating the economic growth for sustainable livelihood;
- alleviating poverty; and
- managing available resources for sustainability and climate smart agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as clearly outlined in the Honourable Minister for Economy’s Budget Address, the impact of COVID-19 on our nation is profound, volatile and as yet, unpredictable. Food security and nutrition stand to be heavily-impacted as the globe undergoes a recession not seen since the 1930’s Great Depression.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, globally, food systems are being impacted by lockdown movements, restrictions, reduced household income and interrupted supply chains. While price and availability of the global food staples remain stable for now, the United Nations World Food Programme has warned that an estimated 265 million people could face acute food insecurity by the end of 2020, up from 135 million people before the crisis because of income and remittance losses.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) has predicted that a number of acutely food-insecure people in the world will increase by 82 percent by the end of 2020, if no action is taken, leading to increased potential for global instability and conflict. The IMF has predicted a global minus 4.9 percent contraction in GDP for 2020. This financial year is shaping up to be a year like no other in our lifetime.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, here in Fiji, while we might have mercifully escaped the worst of the health impacts for now, we are not immune from the effects of the pandemic on our economy and livelihoods. So far, 115,000 people have lost their jobs and the Reserve Bank of Fiji has projected that our economy is set to contract by 21.7 percent in 2020. I commend the Honourable Minister for Economy for his leadership in proposing a bold and forward-looking Budget that will put us on a path to recovery and help us build back better.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has undertaken several initiatives to cushion the effect of the pandemic on food security. It is doing all it can to ensure that Fijian people continue to have access to safe, affordable and nutrition food during these difficult times. To complement the bold and ambitious drive towards the commercialisation of the agriculture sector into a billion-dollar industry, we are ensuring that those households mostly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic have the means and support to become more self-reliant.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are seeing an increase in people returning to their land and villages to plant crops. The success of our home gardening initiative has led to a boom in urban and peri-urban home gardens with excess produce, contributing either to precious household income or bartered for other essentials - the introduction of organic fertiliser that support sustainable food production and livelihoods.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the home gardening initiative received extraordinary response from the general public during the COVID-19 pandemic, when coupled with planting and food preparation guidelines from the Ministry of Health. The 'stay home' policy did provide the best opportunity for people to grow their own from the distributed seed packages by Ministry Officials. This was made possible through the COVID-19 Response Budget allocation of \$1 million and the aid-in-kind seed assistance from the Pacific Community (SPC) and Food Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as of today, a total of 36,495 seed packages have been distributed, representing over 307,000 individual seed packets. The total budget utilisation was \$47,552. This initiative will resume in September 2020, as a next wave with replenished stock of seeds.

The Ministry will continue to source its budget allocation from the Agriculture Extension Services Programme (Crops) with an allocated budget of \$600,000 in the 2020-2021 financial year. Part of the funding will be sourced from the Sustainable Land Management (SLM) Programme, particularly on household modelling and dry seed purchasing. The \$35,000 that will be allocated to the home gardening initiative shall be sourced from the Agriculture Extension Service Programme in the 2020-2021 financial year's budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also mindful of the need to ensure our agricultural farming systems and methods are sustainable and are conducive to maintaining our natural forests, waterways and aquatic food sources. We are increasing our focus on organic, or the use of natural fertilisers as this ensures the sustainability of our natural resources. Organic fertilisers are a kinder and gentler way to give plants the nutrients they need.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, apart from supplying essential nutrients, studies show that the application of organic manure improves the structure of soil and increases its ability to hold water and nutrients.

It also increases the population of beneficial micro-organisms that break down and release nutrients into the soil from the organic materials.

While it complements the home garden initiative, the Ministry of Agriculture is currently embarking on the substantial production and the use of poultry manure that is going to be used by most farmers and individual households in Fiji.

The organic fertiliser initiative is aimed at reducing the impact of conventional farming practices on Fiji's soil, waterways and environment. Furthermore, the initiative will encourage the establishment of organic fertiliser-base farming systems, promoting healthy soil and healthy crops.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while progressing the above initiative, the Ministry is currently developing a conditioning or composting site at the Naduruloulou Research Station in Nausori. Similar sites will be established in Viti Levu, Vanua Levu and Taveuni during the next financial year. Those many sites will be used to condition poultry manure through the use of bacterium culture, before application to farmers' fields and home gardens based on soil analysis and crop nutrient requirements.

The bacterium culture was recently launched in Sigatoka on 10th June, 2020. The role of the anaerobic bacteria species is to speed up the decomposition process of the poultry manure. The fermented fertilizer will basically improve plant growth when applied as foliage spray to crop seedlings and soil.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the budget for the organic fertilizer initiative was sourced from the Green Waste Management (GWM) Activity (\$30,000) under the Sustainable Land Management Programme (SLM) with a total budget of \$300,000. The Ministry will continue to source its funding from the same SLM Programme and GWM Activity for the 2020-20221 financial year.

As global air freight charges have increased, good quality fresh local produce can substitute what was previously imported. We can use this time and temporary downturn in tourist numbers to better strategize and work closely and smartly with other relevant Ministries and tourism operators to prepare for the scale up, once the Bula Bubble is up and running.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry will continue to improve and better refine our preparedness, response and recovery capacity in our effort to protect and help our farmers recover and become self-reliant for sustainable livelihoods.

Similarly, the Ministry of Agriculture will continue to promote climate smart agriculture to ensure we are more determined and resilient in facing any natural disaster that is going to come our way. Rebuilding agriculture as the main driver of economic activity in Fiji is realistic, but it will take a collective effort. I ask Honourable Members to encourage their communities and families to start a farm, however, small, or where people are already farming to aim higher and increase productive levels, expand into value-addition and maybe and/or commercialise their operations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the Ministry of Environment, while the pandemic has impacted global environmental policy, we have not let our guards down at home. The Ministry of Environment has been very proactive in stepping up enforcement of environmental regulations and policies. The Ministry is focussed to continue to enforce environmental laws during this crisis and hope that businesses will acknowledge and adhere to this vital legislation.

During the 2019-2020 financial year, the Ministry of Environment has continued to implement its required ongoing initiative and have also launched new initiatives to safeguard the environment. These include the:

- Ocean Trash Net Audit - Launched on 8th June, 2020, during World Oceans Day by the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy. It involves the physical analysis of the waste composition to provide a detailed understanding of waste disposal behaviour of people living upstream.
- Litter Think Tank Session - Meeting to address chronic situation in the country.
- Monitoring of Ban of Plastic Bag - Ban on single use plastic has significantly led to a decline of plastic bags.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the pandemic has had a profound impact on the global climate diplomacy. It has limited the ability of nations to submit Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), as focus now has shifted on to the pandemic. I fear that developed nations, in their desire to restart the global economy, would emit excessive greenhouse gas, jeopardizing our good work during COP 23.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the national environment clean-up campaign is an activity under the Clean Environment Policy, to promote self-compliance towards anti-litter behaviour in Fiji. Sir, 15 clean-up campaigns were undertaken during the 2019-2020 financial year.

The Ministry carried out three Litter Prevention Officers (LPOs) trainings and trained 53 LPOs in this financial year. The LPOs trained included staff from Fiji Ports and Fiji Surf.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry held nine Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) roundtables and clinics with businesses all over Fiji. These roundtables and EIA clinics have played a significant role in helping businesses understand the key legislative expectations from the Government when it comes to permits, and provides an excellent platform to address the delayed permits with a remarkable track record – nine out of ten cases have been resolved on the spot during consultation.

The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) organised a two-day workshop to train 25 Environmental Officers. The purpose of the training was to train officers on enforcement and prosecution. The Department also trained and had four fully trained prosecutors.

The Department is the executing agency for the Fiji Ridge to Reef (R2R) Project. Until to date, in collaboration with partners, the R2R Project has planted approximately 14.52 hectares of native fruit and timber seedlings, all in the Waidina Catchment; and 10.75 hectares of mangroves, all in the Rewa Catchment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, seagrass planting at the Nasese foreshore was officiated by the Honourable Minister for Environment. Seagrass, apart from protecting our ecosystem, helps in carbon sequestration. It sequesters carbon ten times more than forests. The Ministry of Environment is in the process of establishing seagrass nurseries in strategic locations in Fiji, as part of its blue carbon initiative.

The Ministry of Environment is the focal point for the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and chairs the Small Grants Programme which is managed by UNDP. The Small Grants Programme provides grant of up to US\$50,000 to local communities and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) to undertake projects aimed at protecting our environment. Eight projects were approved in the fiscal year 2019-2020.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Environment is in the process of reporting its implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity as part of the Sixth National Reporting



(6NR). Fiji will focus its reporting against Global Aichi Biodiversity Targets and National Biodiversity Targets in the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) 2020-2025.

The Fiji NBSAP 2020-2025 is a policy document formulated in response to Fiji's obligation under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), to ensure that Fiji meets the objectives of CBD as a party, and guides the implementation of the Convention at the national level. The Ministry will continue to work with partners to implement the NBSAP.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the policy on the Conservation and Management of Fiji's Coral Reefs aims to guide and enhance the Ministry of Environment's leadership and mandatory roles in effectively executing programmes that support coral reefs' conservation in Fiji, and commitments made at regional and global levels.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the International Biodiversity Day was celebrated on 22nd May, 2020, and along with the week to raise awareness on biodiversity and the important role it plays globally. The theme for this year was, "Our solutions are in Nature". The theme provided an opportunity through stakeholder engagement and media coverage to raise awareness on some of the nature-based solutions.

In addition, policies on Conservation and Management of Coral Reefs and Associated Ecosystems and the Conservation and Protection of the Fijian Iguana Species were launched by the Honourable Minister. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Assistant Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Salote Radrodro. You have the floor, Ma'am.

HON S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to make my contribution, my response to the 2020-2021 National Budget, and I do so with great sadness and concern. The people are equally concerned and their genuine take on the Budget is that, it is a rudderless, debt-escalating Budget, a Budget that continued to turn promises into debts.

Even though the Honourable Minister for Economy has capitalised on the pandemic as an excuse for Fiji's economic doom, the people know from their daily hardship and struggles that this FijiFirst Government has continuously failed them, even before COVID-19.

We will recall that the Budget Address was delayed for more than an hour, with the Honourable Minister for Economy dashing in from that side door and the rest, including the Honourable Prime Minister, walking in from there, but minus the main two leading the pack, with smiles and happy conversations to announce their grand arrival as they normally do in previous times.

Their entrance, Mr. Speaker, depicted a very disorganised FijiFirst Government that has lost confidence and has clearly lost its way. But it is not surprising because they know, they have a huge challenge, a huge task ahead of them in having to deal with the people with continuous false promises in previous and in this Budget.

They know that \$1.4 billion or 39 percent of the total Budget of \$3.7 billion is deliberately held under Requisition to Incur Expenditure (RIE) by the Honourable Minister for Economy. And they know that the release of that fund is subject to availability from the Fiji Revenue and Customs Services (FRCS) and local and international financial institutions.

The Government side knows that the determining factor in their success or otherwise, in the implementation of projects and programmes under their Ministries and Departments as listed in the Budget for public service delivery to the people, hinges on the release of funds under RIE. Yet, Mr. Speaker, none of them, including the Honourable Minister for Fisheries, who have already spoken was honest and responsible enough to highlight this. They continue to mislead the people with all those promises, even though they know very well that there is problematic cashflow.

Mr. Speaker, I urge those Honourable Members from the other side of the House who will be speaking next, like the:

- Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment on agriculture;
- Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing on defence;
- Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources on infrastructure, Land Transport Authority (LTA) and roads;
- Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation; and
- Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services on health;

to advise this House on how much of their budget is held under RIE, and approximately how much will be released to carry out the programmes that are stated in the Budget.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, we continue to hear on their new norm and, indeed, I just heard from the Honourable Assistant Minister for Agriculture on the new norm and, that is, the urban to rural drift. He was the only one that mentioned that.

Mr. Speaker, recently whilst in Bua, I noticed, especially those who have lost their jobs, are starting to return to their villages and rural communities in Vanua Levu, and I am sure this is also the trend in other communities around Fiji. The economic downturn will get worse and will trigger subsequent increasing trend in the urban to rural drift, as people try and readjust their lives to address these economic challenges. And I urge the Government to review policies, or even formulate new ones, that would help people in their move back to their rural communities and also prepare the rural communities in receiving them.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, as already mentioned, Honourable Ministers will be faced with delay and non-achievement of work targets and people will suffer the consequences of poor public service delivery. The following are examples:

- Visit the CWM Hospital, particularly CWM Maternity Hospital and see the dire need for renovation, even though we continuously hear in every Budget that allocation is being drawn up, being announced for the repair of the CWM Hospital.
- Drive through Nasinu and Nausori corridor housing subdivisions and see rubbish piled up on roadsides. This is one issue I have continuously raised in this House on the poor waste management in Fiji.
- Visit Vanuabalavu and see the absence of passenger shelter, waiting shed that has always been promised in previous Budgets and also in other maritime islands. There is still the problematic telephone connections. When the Vodafone tower went down in *TC Winston*, it still has not been repaired.

- Visit Yacata Island and see, Honourable Minister for Education, the primary school that was destroyed by *TC Winston*, which is still work in progress.

As such, Mr. Speaker, I join my colleagues on this side of the House in stating that this Budget is a well-framed, well thought-out, theoretical, deceiving Budget. It is a Budget that is aimed at saving their own face, instead of helping the marginalised and vulnerable members of our communities. And the truth of the matter is, this Budget drives Fiji further down the road of disaster and crisis and as such, I do not support this Budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our GDP is on an all-time low, contracted by 21.7 percent and Fiji has never seen that in its history. The performance of our local sectors continue to decline. There is a steady decline in investment, even before the COVID-19 pandemic. Unemployment is high, even when you were the Minister, Honourable Usamate, and it is still rising, and those who have lost their jobs still have to use their FNPF to help themselves.

Even before COVID-19, Fiji's GDP growth was not good. The ADB projection in December 2019 ranked Fiji at No. 11, amongst the 14 Pacific Island Countries. Even Tuvalu, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and Kiribati all ranked higher than Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe that the only unprecedented growth our economy has ever seen, is the growth of debt. *Sa levu sara ga na dinau*. Our national debt stock have increased more than three times since 2006, from around \$2.5 billion to \$8.3 billion in 2020. Yet, the Honourable Minister for Economy had the audacity to say that borrowing now to build for tomorrow, means future generations can build less. Is that a joke?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the truth of the matter is, we are burdening our future generation with our current borrowings. The Government has not only failed our generation, but moreso failed our future generations, and this is indicative of poor leadership economically and politically. I ask those Honourable Members on the other side, would you leave that kind of debt for your children to inherit?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me now share a few comments on the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. The total allocation for the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation has increased by \$14 million but, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that only looks good on paper.

As I have mentioned before, this Budget is a well-framed, thought-out, theoretical deceiving Budget. I say 'deceiving' because out of the \$159 million, about \$135 million is held under Requisition, and that is around 82 percent to 85 percent of the Ministry's total budget, which includes all core programmes and projects, such as social benefits and the women plan of action.

This type of budget creates false hope to the already very vulnerable poor recipients of social welfare assistance, which causes unnecessary financial, physical, emotional and mental stress and associated problems. And if this FijiFirst Government really cares about our women, children, senior citizens, persons with disabilities especially now, then put your money where your mouth is, Honourable Prime Minister, and tell your Minister for Economy to release the \$135 million under 'R'.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the Australian Government for the social welfare top-up of \$7.8 million, but this amount is also held under 'R'. In acknowledging this assistance, I hope the Ministry will be looking at programmes that will enable more social welfare recipients to graduate this government assistance and also initiate constructive strategies that would help change the dependency mindset syndrome. As a saying goes, "Give a man a fish and you will feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and you will feed him for a lifetime."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while I advocate for women empowerment, especially in rural areas, I am also mindful of the situation our economy is in, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. I note, however, that there is an allocation of \$3 million for the construction of the Fiji Barefoot College, and this has been a recurring item in the Budget. That is a 600 percent increase from the revised allocation of \$500,000 in the COVID-19 Response Budget.

I have raised my concerns regarding delays on the construction of the Fiji Barefoot College in this august House, but I believe that the timing for this allocation is not right now. This allocation could have been directed to other priority areas to help our rural women, especially in food security programmes during these trying times.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the issue of domestic violence against women which the Honourable Minister for Women has alluded to in this House so many times, there has been a significant increase in calls to the Helpline, and further added to that, close to 50 percent of women are reporting a correlation between COVID-19 and an increase in violence against women. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this can be due to restriction of movement and economic constraints in families.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again the Budget deceives the people by failing to ease the tensions on economic constraints on families. In a survey carried out by the Fiji Council of Social Services, they found that families are struggling to provide food on the table after breadwinners were laid off due to COVID-19. What our nation really needs is a people-centred budget that takes into account the daily struggles of our ordinary citizens and a first step that the Government could take is to reduce the budget allocation held under 'R', at least, by 10 percent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our people matter now than ever before, but the Government as usual, has given us a rudderless and debt-escalating Budget, a Budget that has continuously turned out promises into debts. This Budget fails to ease the tension of economic constraints in the houses of ordinary families across our nation. It has torn our social fabric further as it is a fight for survival for most families. The struggle to make ends meet may have led to some negative coping mechanism, potentially resulting in high crime rate, especially when the curfew is lifted.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to share few comments on the Civil Service Reform Agenda, and say that this Reform has failed to achieve its purpose of increasing efficiency and effectiveness and in reducing operating cost in Government service delivery. Let us look at these few examples.

Hiring of expatriates; the marginalisation of local expertise in favour of expensive expatriates has been a hallmark of this Government. We have seen expatriates even leave without completing their contract, not only in the Civil Service but also in other institutions, like USP. Subsequently, one of the nagging issues is the severance pay and the whole hiring of expatriates is, indeed, an expensive exercise.

It is unacceptable to see our locals who are well qualified and more than capable to fill in executive positions in the Public Service, Judiciary and Statutory Bodies being sidelined and favouring expatriates. As a result, there is a significant braindrain of our well qualified people, whom Fiji has invested heavily in, in their education, leave our shores to other Pacific Island countries. Mr.

Speaker, Sir, only an irresponsible Government, like FijiFirst, would do this because they do not value our human capital. Can the Honourable Minister responsible confirm how much the CEO in LTA is paid?

In 2015, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the new Ministry of Civil Service was established and an expatriate Permanent Secretary was brought in to drive, monitor and evaluate the various Civil Service reform initiatives, but interestingly, as at to date, this Ministry has submitted only one Annual Report to this House. I urge the Government to capitalise on our local expertise to save money and this money can be used to pay overtime and meal allowances for civil servants, and pay allowances for medical professions, like nurses, their consolidated allowance in rural areas.

On the Ministry of Education, they have spent almost \$11 million on the free milk and Weet-Bix programme in schools. How has this made positive impacts in our children's education? I would urge the Honourable Minister for Education to ....

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I urge the Government to invest this \$11 million to support our young adolescence girls in rural schools in menstrual health and hygiene programme in the supply of reusable cloth or disposable sanitary pads, and also to raise awareness on this programme so that our girls do not miss school when they have their menstruation period.

There is about \$29 million, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that has been spent on the leasing of vehicles and if we buy vehicles at \$100,000 just like we have done before, that would have bought 290 vehicles. And if we have bought vehicles that a cost \$60,000 we would have bought 480 vehicles. But this \$29 million, Mr. Speaker, is an irresponsible use of the taxpayers' funds. I would urge Government to revert to the buying of vehicles as previously done by previous Governments. This will benefit the business owner more than the Civil Service.

Mr. Speaker, may I now share some comments on Foreign Affairs. We have heard from the Honourable Minister for Economy that five Missions have been closed, but what we must note is that the Fiji Government opened two Embassies in Ethiopia and Brazil and only soon after that, they were closed again. This clearly reflects poor decision-making which resulted in huge losses of taxpayers' money and at the same time, demonstrates a high level of irresponsibility on the Government's part.

Now, they want to close the five Missions, and I wonder what their criteria for closure are? If it is cost, then Geneva is a very expensive Mission to keep and in closing Brussels, how and who will be covering the ACP Committee of Ambassadors and joint ACP-EU Meeting which meet almost on a daily basis to ensure the smooth implementation and execution of the multi-billion ACP-EU Cotonou Agreement? Will Geneva be covering Brussels, Honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs? If so, this is a very costly exercise.

Mr. Speaker, furthermore, we note in the press that the Ambassador Designate, Mr. Amena Yauvoli, cited that he was being prepared to resume post in Washington DC but, again, this Embassy, as we have been advised in this House, will be closed. The Honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs is just sitting next door to the Honourable Minister for Economy. I mean, is this a confused Government where the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing?

Mr. Speaker, in concluding, the reality of the matter in this Budget is that, even before COVID-19, unemployment had steadily increased, poverty continued to increase, crime rate

increased and hard drugs entering our borders increased and yet, we only hear of marijuana farmers being thrown into prison. Public service delivery is appalling and the continuous deteriorating condition of our basic infrastructure.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- You support marijuana farmers?

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- You went to Kadavu, Honourable Prime Minister.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Yes.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- You could have done your own survey there.

On the pandemic situation as an excuse for Fiji's economic doom, the FijiFirst Government has continued to borrow from \$2.5 billion in 2006 to \$8.3 billion in 2020. This means that our future generation will be burdened to pay all those debts, therefore, they cannot borrow anymore. Development will be much slower and while other countries will be progressing forward, Fiji will be left behind paying our debts.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, this is a theoretical deceiving Budget which can and will take Fiji into a nation in crisis and, therefore, we must reset our economy with the human face guided by policy direction and programmes that will put food on the table and address problems that simple ordinary people - the poor people, the homeless, beggars and all Fijians are faced with everyday. And I urge the Government to reduce the budget allocation under RIE to, at least, 10 percent so that Honourable Ministers can actualise those promises that they did harp about in this House and review policies and programmes to address this urban to rural drift.

(Laughter)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- With those words, Mr. Speaker, I do not support this Budget. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Salote Radrodru for her contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Honourable Vijendra Prakash. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. PRAKASH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament and dear audience here and abroad; it is, indeed, an honour and a privilege to support the 2020-2021 National Budget that has been proposed by the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Telecommunications for the next 2020-2021 fiscal year.

This Budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will bring about many good opportunities for our citizens to assist them in their daily lives and businesses. This Budget will also enable economic recovery, bringing birth to new opportunities and a stable future for all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this uncertain pandemic crisis is affecting everyone globally and locally. It will take time and effort to overcome challenges during this time of global crisis. We salute the efforts of the entire medical and defence staff for their efforts in containing this virus. I am also thankful for the Government's effort in successfully providing safety to all its people from the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

COVID-19 virus, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has changed the country's economic situation and stability but due to good leadership under the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Attorney-

General and Minister for Economy has made proper allocation of resources to counter and bring our country back to its feet from this global pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, protecting our people is protecting families. It is protecting our economy, protecting productivity and protecting the wellbeing of our country. During such uncertainties, hard times and sufferings, aspiration of people through good governance will bring opportunities to build a better future for all. This Budget will provide relief to thousands of families and keep businesses and companies afloat.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to have a positive mindset so that we can have confidence in overcoming any difficulty. With positivity, we are able to have a will that can face any challenge. There is a saying, if there is a will, there is a way or if there is a way, there is a will.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, communities are becoming more resilient and stronger in overcoming challenges and adversities. We, as leaders, need to empower them as individuals to communicate, resist, absorb, accommodate and recover from the effects of hazards and turmoil in a timely and effective manner.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the United Nations has commended the Fijian National Budget for being bold and courageous. Yes, Mr. Speaker, this is what Fiji needs, a Budget that is bold and courageous from our leader, a leader who spoke up and stepped forward and who took the risk of true leadership when radical change was required. He has encountered situations that demanded courage, and it was not easy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, courageous leadership requires strong principle and tremendous tenacity. For this, we thank our Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Attorney-General for standing up for the people and confronting reality head-on and staying on course, even when it gets tough. We will come out of this crisis with perseverance, prayers and a positive outlook of life.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would also like to take this time to thank the commitment by other Honourable Ministers, members of the Government and each and every Fijian who has risen above the occasion to battle this virus and its impact.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Government has administrated its finance for the best interest of its people at all times, and I repeat, this Government has administrated its finance for the best interest of its people at all times.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the announcement of the 2020-2021 National Budget by the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications, majority of our people demonstrated a sense of satisfaction and hope for a pathway to a better and brighter future. Many of our countrymen and women thanked the Almighty God for the opportunities in the budgetary allocation towards moving the nation in the correct direction.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, reduction of taxes on many items will definitely increase buying capacities to stimulate the economy and help in securing employment. This Budget will also help the construction industry in investing in many building projects that will be implemented, thus creating increased employment opportunities for our people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the increase in the National Budget allocation towards the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty and Alleviation, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Forestry and Ministry of Defence, National Security and Policing provides a timely boost needed

to improve and provide security, job opportunities and build a strong confidence in the nation and the world for a safer and a better holiday destination.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$100 million is allocated towards those who are currently unemployed, those on reduced hours and those who need to re-skill themselves for more opportunities. This will mean a lot to their families during these most trying times. This is what a true people's government does for those who need a helping hand in moving the nation forward.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are always lessons to be learnt from any difficult situation that comes in life. This pandemic period has brought a lot of paradigm shift towards the value of land and resources available to us in its proper utilisation and care. Cultivation of crops, vegetables and use of marine resources around us will contribute towards food security for our families and the economy.

The increase in the budgetary allocation to the Ministry of Agriculture will further help in various best farming habits in crops and livestock. The upgrade of laboratory facilities in the Ministry will assist farmers towards scientific and modern economical farming habits, supplementing imports and increasing exports. The existing and newcomers in farming business will enjoy enormous opportunities available in the proper utilisation of farm and sea resources to produce variety of produce.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during any time of disaster and hardship, generous donors from various sectors in Fiji and abroad have stood tall to support us during nation building. They have generously contributed to those in need and deserve our heartfelt thanks and appreciation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we should all be patriotic to this land that we call home, where we can create a common platform and understanding the people of different races and beliefs in this country, and to work together in a positive and constructive manner in nation building activities. This is possible, as those with patriotic hearts will always be willing to trade off their comfort for the sake of the country's interest. The spirit of patriotism will also permeate positive values and instil good ethics in all walks of life. Indirectly, this will drive all sorts of negative influence which could possibly bring damage to the national agenda.

This Government, the FijiFirst Government, will fight tooth and nail to keep the sovereignty and dignity of this nation intact. Therefore, I ask each one of us to support this Government for the betterment of our country.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker. Sir, this Budget is the best way to revamp the Fijian economy after the COVID-19 impact, and I fully support this timely and bold 2020-2021 National Budget. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Vijendra Prakash and I now give the floor to the Honourable Simione Rasova.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- *Ni sa bula vinaka*, Mr. Speaker, Sir. *Bula vinaka*, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, Honourable Leader of the loyal Opposition, Members of Parliament and all devoted citizens of Fiji listening and watching.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I respond to the Appropriation Bill for the 2020-2021 Budget, that is currently before the House, I would like to congratulate the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA) management, its vice-presidents and general secretary in time of our Party's suspension, as directed by the Supervisor of Elections with its trickle effect down to our suspension, the independence of Parliament, our 21 Members of Parliament, including this Kadavu candidate.



My further congratulation to the SODELPA management in organising several other board meetings and last Saturday, 25th July, 2020, the special general meeting where 21 loyal members under the COVID-19 restrictions unanimously elected new SODELPA president, Ratu Epenisa Cakobau of Kubuna Confederacy and its three new Vice-Presidents, Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa from the Burebasaga Confederacy, Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu from the Tovata Confederacy and *ara na yadra*, former SODELPA Minister George Shiu Raj from *Yasayasa vaka Ra*. Thank you for having us, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Now, that we are back in your Parliament Chambers with full commitment to the duties expected of your loyal Opposition and perhaps, a guarantee of your unwavering legal protection of our independence here, Mr. Speaker Sir.

I wish to thank Mr. George Patterson and Patterson Shipping to be the second alternate wide-bodied maritime vessel to operate twice weekly Monday and Tuesday, Thursday and Friday to the chiefly island of Kadavu. The people of Kadavu favourably welcomes competition from both service providers Patterson Shipping and Gounder Shipping and also the existing franchise operators *MV Liahona* and *MV Nabukelevu*.

Improved maritime service has been an Occupational Health & Safety issue since kingdom come for Vanua Levu, Lau Group, Lomaiviti, Rotuma, Mamanuca, Yasawa, probably Beqa and Vatulele. With our new Minister for Transport allocated with a \$2.6m shipping services subsidy and \$3.9 million operation grant and capital grant of \$600,000 to the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji, it is surely a realisation of unlimited upgraded events will surface rather than just the fancy irresponsible deceiving budget being the current trend in their years of governmental leadership.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister for Economy has brought our beloved Fiji to its knees begging with this unprecedented \$2 billion net deficit to balance the estimated expenditure of \$3.7 billion. This is a well-framed, thought-out, theoretical, deceiving Budget, a Budget to save face in a crisis situation. From a layman's perspective of earning \$1.7 billion, their simple expenses will be around the same, unknowingly of an existing debt of \$8.25 billion and an unprecedented debt level never experienced in our Fiji economy.

The late Honourable Qarase was blamed for almost bankrupting Fiji at a debt level of \$2.5 billion on 6th December, 2006. The Messiah illegally took over Government, promising the late president *Turaga Na Tui Vuda* that he will eradicate and make Fiji corrupt-free, debtless and make Fiji free again. Well, 14 years later, we are knocking at doors of financial doom.

Our Honourable Prime Minister and former Commander of the RFMF in 2006, saw fit to overthrow illegally the late Honourable Prime Minister, *Na Turaga Tui Kobuca's Government* with the great 1997 Constitution which protected Government from misuse of Government funds, introducing an illegal 2013 Constitution and created four times more, an unprecedented reality from \$2.5 billion to \$8.26 billion debt today.

What is happening here, Honourable Prime Minister? If that commitment was the same as on 7th December, 2006, we should be expecting someone to run to the Government House to inform His Excellency the President of the unprecedented debt accumulated, resulting from corruption, nepotism, lack of transparency and absence of democracy. As a result, Fiji is at a cross road and at a point of no return, resulting in Bills introduced for tariff reduction from five percent FNPF contribution by employee, employer until 31st December, 2021.

A 21.2 percent contraction of economy, a 20.2 percent net deficit of GDP, one percent inflation where with \$100 million allocated for Employment Assistance Scheme, another top up of \$30 million allocated for MSME loan programme and \$60 million for Fiji Recovery Rebate

Programme Bula Bubble and Bula Lane, I love the Taxi drivers' quote "*Na Kalou sa raica*". Why are we doing all these?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the real question about this Budget, how did we get here in the first place? No matter how fancy the words and figures are placed in defence of this Budget. How did we get here before COVID-19? Stop blaming COVID-19. How will Fiji's economy grow?

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Listen, from what evidence? Do you have one? Because all is forecasted, only evidence everyone can see, there is no money. It is an irresponsible deceiving budget, Mr. Speaker Sir, I love the KISS principle "Keep It Simple Simione"

How will the hardworking citizens of Fiji know you will get your targets? How will the FijiFirst get us out of dooms hole? There is no recovery plan, I will embrace the Bula Bubble & Bula Lane for economic recovery of Fiji. Tread well with the New Zealanders and Australians, they know who we are, how more frequent we belittle them? Because without Bula Bubble, it will be a "Mate Bubble" and "Mate Lane" and we will go back to the origin of a regressive Budget without vision because it is irresponsible and deceiving.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for Fisheries, who is from Yawe, Kadavu and an old boy of Lelean, for his contribution to the debate and I wish to contribute on the budget detail under the Ministry of Fisheries.

Head 31 under the Ministry of Fisheries, the budget is declining every year, even though it is Fiji's leading primary resource base sector which contributes to 1.8 percent to GDP. Having to employ around 580 plus workers, Fiji wide with the biggest surface mess, more than land, it is in the safe hands with Government and with its traditional resources owners, as far as the north of Yasawa to Rotuma, through Vanua Levu to the Lau group, from the Olympic swimmers of Ono-i- Lau to Ono in Kadavu, Nabukelvu-i- Ra to Yasayasa Moala and the coastal areas of Fiji and Vanua Levu, including the 200 miles EEZ.

The 2020-2021 total expenditure in the Ministry of Fisheries is \$15.47 million, with a total Operating Expenditure of \$10.656 million and Capital Expenditure of \$4.09 million. A total of \$2.24 million is under "R". This is what I call the "*Rere*" account. It is there but cannot touch because God Father is looking.

Anyway, in 'R' *Rere* account, the Electronic Monitoring System (EMS) of \$600,000, Seaweed Development Programme, On-going constructions of Multi Species Hatchery in Ra with \$417,766, Upgrade of Office and Quarters \$100,530 and the Preparatory Works for the Ice Plants in Wainigadru and Koro, completion of Wainibokasi staff quarters and its final payment is all inclusive in the \$110,000; all in RIE. It is about \$2.24 million in "R". Most of these "R" or *Rere* budgets have been ongoing since 2018-2019 Budget, 2019-2020 Budget and now 2020-2021 Budget, and decreasing meaning that the Honourable Minister is at it and thanks to the Minister for this detailed explanation yesterday of the Ministry from his *ucu mai duru* reply.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, fisheries export revenue figures is not forthcoming. The revenue for fisheries was about \$115.9 million in 2015, a remarkable achievement. We had about \$8.7 million decrease in 2016 to about \$107 million. A further decrease in revenue in 2017 to \$94.4 million, however an increase of \$6 million in 2018. Another further decrease of \$5 million in 2019 and a further decrease of almost \$40 million in its 2020 forecast. But there is an increase of \$13.8 million, a forecast in 2020-2021 and an increase forecast by \$5 million in 2022.

What makes this budget trends irresponsible and deceiving is that, when expenditure increases, export revenue decreases in millions as outlined earlier except in 2018. Now that the expenditure has decreased in 2021 forecast, the forecast revenue increased and another increase in 2022. Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is the integrity of the Honourable Minister for Fisheries to top-up his better performance until the next elections, as fisheries is not performing to its vision as the leader in fisheries in small island economies to drive sustainable resources management, economic growth and improve livelihood through SMART fisheries.

Sustainable Development Goals 14 - Life Below Water at inshore, rivers, streams and offshore must be well maintained, establishing protected marine areas targeting 30 percent of Fiji marine life, a great time to re-activate those who have lost their jobs, hotel and airline workers into fishing activities. Exempt the boat master levy of \$136 and also the boat fees every year. Almost everything are exempted except the maritime areas. Please, include maritime Islands of Kadavu, Vatulele, Beqa, Matuku, Southern Lau to Ono-i-Lau, that were badly affected by *TC Harold*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Fisheries has yet to put its SDG target points on the website, with environment pillar of sustainable islands and ocean resources.

Shrimps import to Fiji is about \$25 million annually. The Ministry of Fisheries with association with industries and farms to reduce it by \$1 million on a yearly basis. Is this being achieved? This is a good time to improve this target exercise. What is happening to the beche-de-mer ban, Mr. Speaker? The people of Kadavu are asking, the people around the Coral Coast, Lomaiviti, Vanua Levu, Lau, Yasawa and the Chinese are hungry.

As the Ministry of Fisheries is committed to all maritime islands for this preservation resources of food supply and employment, with a \$15.473 million, I stand to seek the Minister for Agriculture as for all maritime islands for the budget of the Yaqona Farming Programme with \$250,000, Vanilla Farming - \$140,000, Women in Agriculture - \$250,000, Dalo Farming Programme - \$350,000, Farm mechanisation - \$500,000 and Rural and Outer Island Agriculture Programme - \$900,000. Please maritime islands, Kadavu, Matuku, Lau, Lomaiviti, Rotuma, Vatulele, Beqa, Mamanuca and the Yasawas. Honourable Premila Kumar remember the maritime islands, they are part of Fiji too.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, last week SODELPA as the alternative government, vibrant, national movement inclusive of the interest and aspiration of each and every community in Fiji proved that we have the ability to sail through a storm and emerge stronger and united. This, of course is felt across the Chamber as we find the Government side angered by our unity and more the alternative ideologies that we had put in course in this budget debate.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am a person who gets along with ordinary citizens very easily so that they can confide their grudges and grievances as well as their interests and aspirations very openly. Let me share a few of them.

One young man from Suva who had been laid off his job due to the COVID-19 crisis could not access his FNPF yet while discussing about his budget said "*Boso*, lot of good things in the budget? But how will they get the money from to make it a reality?" That explains the concerns of the people on the unprecedented \$2.7 billion deficit in this budget.

The other is an astute observation by a university student. This young person asked, how is it possible for the FijiFirst Government to now remove duty on more than 1,600 items when on the eve of November 2018 elections, the same Government said removal of VAT on 25 basic food items would make Fiji a bankrupt state? Can you see the logic in this young person's argument?

The third and last one that I want to share is an expression from a FijiFirst voter herself who said she voted for them because of security issues, the freebies and now realised her mistake. It proves the point that you cannot fool some people some of the time, some all the time but not all the people all the time, thus, leading me to say that this budget is a gross betrayal of mandate by this irresponsible, ego-centric and selfish Government.

The other thing that has clearly emerged from this budget is how to spin a tale or make a myth look like a hype or rather reality. With its usual fairy tales befitting Cinderella and Alice in Wonderland trumpeted by the Honourable Minister for Economy, it is a fun to see how some mouth pieces of this Government are parroting to the tune to this effect. They include:

- (1) The CEO of Commerce and Consumer Competition Commission of Fiji;
- (2) Fiji Institute of Accountants;
- (3) Fiji Sun;
- (4) Fiji Broadcasting Commission;
- (5) FijiFirst social media/ cyber warriors whose numbers are depleting by each passing day; and
- (6) Very lately, and a bit surprisingly meddling in Fiji's internal affairs the Office of the United Nations based in Suva.

All in all, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this drama to give some credence to this hopeless and self-deceiving budget is not working. On the contrary, it is skinning the cat to the bone and exposing the truth of the matter as never ever before.

What is the truth of the matter, Mr. Speaker? It is years of spending a drunkard in a night club promoting its socialist policies and programmes, inculcating and then entrenching the dependency syndrome via the hand-out culture, lack of discipline in financial management, unsound leadership and turning promises into debts. This Government has put Fiji on a pathway to socio- economic catastrophe and imminent bankruptcy. That is the ultimate truth about this budget.

Maritime places like Kadavu, Beqa, Vatulele, Lomaiviti, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are going to suffer from what they have been suffering in the past under this uncaring Government. This budget for rural and remote communities means:

- (1) Withholding of all maintenance and capital works with respect to major infrastructure projects;
- (2) Lack of development of tourism and eco-tourism development due to border lockdown and the *bula* bubble bursting like a boom becoming a doom;
- (3) Pending development of resource based sectors such as agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries and forests given the budgetary allocations;
- (4) Continuing poverty of access and only affording state services at a considerable cost;
- (5) The goodies announced in the budget not translating into the welfare and security of the ordinary people given the dismal record of this Government to rise revenue via loans to bridge the wide gap created at an all-time high of a \$2.7 billion budget deficit, making it not only an unrealistic budget but depicting this Government is attempting to live beyond its means in the utopia.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the failure to inject funding for agro-based industries will have a drastic effect on kava growers in places like Kadavu. They are already frustrated by factors like the:

- (1) impact of natural disasters and climate change;
- (2) division caused by the intention of this Government setting up a Kava Council as opposed to Kava Growers Council;
- (3) objects of regulating the kava industry without consulting the growers;
- (4) impact upon the market (sales and price) of kava at home and abroad given the global economic meltdown resultant from COVID-19;
- (5) failures such as this one as the kava industry is pushing our people living in rural and remote areas seeking to make a decent living on the margins of society and some to cultivate and trade in products like drugs.

The mention of substance abuse, Mr. Speaker, Sir, brings me to say a few words of the Fiji Police and more so on its ongoing reforms which welcome. This is a timely action though late and at a considerable cost to our national coffers is about \$24 million per annum for five years.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- *Wawa, wawa!*

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I endorse and support the comments made by Honourable Ratu Niumataiwalu today on policing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on this side of the House I was touched and grateful that the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy thank God twice in his irresponsible, rudderless deceiving Budget on 17th July. Yes, this God is great and definitely acts in mysterious ways. This, with the loyal opposition financial minds and support, we will ask God in our prayers to temporarily borrow the rudder to sail through this financial stormy waters or show us a way to allow citizens of Fiji to swim sustainably rather than just be kept afloat to a better economic safe shore for Fiji.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy alluded and I quote: "Every Member of this side of the House would fork out our life savings before we see these initiatives go through".

Mr. Speaker, Sir, please request all their bank statements, bonds and their savings - \$2,750, gross deficit will be cleared, no doubt, and save Fiji from their usual aggressive attack of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), World Bank, IMF, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) which is a multi-lateral development bank, from the gross deficit.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I say all these in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Simione Rasova for his contribution to the debate. Proceedings will now be suspended for refreshments which will be held in the Big Committee Room. We will resume in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.42 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.12 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will continue with the debate on the Budget and I now call on the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament and the people of Fiji: *Bula vinaka* to you all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to deliver my response to the 2020-2021 Budget for the Ministry of Agriculture, Waterways and Environment in particular, and I support the Budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to begin by responding to some of the untruths or lies being paddled by the Honourable Members of the Opposition since yesterday and make sure Secretary-General (SG) to Parliament and Deputy Secretary-General (DSG) to Parliament keep my time right - give me a few extra minutes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, yesterday, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition started, went to town trying hard to run down the Budget, just one week before he publicly stated that this is a Brave, Bold, Prudent (BBP) Budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what had happened over the one week period? Was he under pressure from his colleagues? Was he under siege that he thought, "Look, you can't be honest, we will lose votes. Come on, you are in Opposition, go and oppose the Budget?" What had happened over one week, Mr. Speaker, Sir? For the first time ever, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition was honest in saying, "It was indeed a Brave, Bold and Prudent Budget."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, he noted that our healthcare system is in complete shambles. Go and ask everyone on the streets, they will tell you that our healthcare system is not in shambles. You look at how our Honourable Minister for Health and Honourable Prime Minister took charge and ensured that there is no community transmission in this country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, today we are able to gather here, people are able to undertake social gatherings, weddings have resumed, businesses have resumed because our community is COVID-19-free and here, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition is saying that our healthcare system is in shambles. How do we believe him? This is the kind of people who want to lead this country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, he went on to say that the Fijian economy was in problem, in major dire strait from 2014 or a few years before that. He understands statistics and he can see the growth trajectory of the economy since 2014 or a few years back. How can he say or make that kind of statement saying that our economy was in bad shape since a few years before 2014? No! We had positive unprecedented growth in 2014. Despite us facing *TC Winston*, we were able to bounce back and now here, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition is saying that our economy was in a bad shape a few years before, from 2014.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition termed the Budget as irresponsible, rudderless and deceiving. And I saw a third mentality, the rest of the flock followed him and said, "the rudderless Budget, irresponsible Budget".

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have not heard any of them saying what was irresponsible about the Budget. I have not seen anyone showing an example of what is rudderless about this Budget, and I have not heard any single one saying what aspect of the Budget was deceiving to the public.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I challenge the remaining Honourable Members to pick up these three aspects and come explicitly and demonstrate that this Budget is irresponsible, it is rudderless and it is deceiving. I want to see examples, otherwise the public of Fiji will have no more confidence on them, and there are writings on the wall.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition said that there are high amounts of funds held in “R” and, therefore, not allowed to be committed and I saw other Honourable Members from the other side also speaking about “Rs”. Mr. Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, none of them, given that all of them are complaining about “R” or under Requisition or RIE, it seems that none of them understands why these funds are placed under “R”, except for those in SEGs 1 and 2.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, assume for a second, in the first month, all the Ministries start sending LPOs of all those expenditure, what will happen? They have no idea of what cash flow management is.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- ... put on the stop watch, let them finish, let them finish. You had your time and now you want to use my time.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Oder, order!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the allocations under requisition (R) are there to ensure that the Ministry of Economy understands what is happening to the total amount of allocation that they have, which Ministry is spending in which particular area, what particular day, what particular week and in what particular month.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the Minister for Economy is the Head of Finance and Head of Treasury, he or she and in this case, he, has the right to understand the amount of outlay expenditure occurring at every point in time. Mr. Speaker, Sir, they want to have a Minister for Economy who would basically have no understanding about the cash flow situation - no understanding, this is the problem.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- This is the problem.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, they want to have a Minister for Economy who will be sleeping on the job. That is why during those times of the SDL Government and SVT Government, the situation was so bad with regard to government finances.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am responding.

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- *Momo*, this is budget response.

(Laughter)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition responded that high debt to GDP ratio was due to bad policies, poor governance and poor attitude. I want to know from the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, what bad policies contributed to high debt to GDP ratio? What were the poor governance practices that contributed to the high debt to GDP ratio? What was the poor attitude he was talking about? Whose attitude he is talking about that led to the high debt to GDP ratio? What has attitude got to do with the high debt to GDP ratio?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is their level of understanding of financial economy and they want to run the government. I do not know where they get their numbers from. They are saying that of all the raw materials imported into the country, 90 percent are imported. Where did they get their numbers from, Mr. Speaker, Sir? Are they talking about the entire production system and saying that only 10 percent of the raw materials are derived domestically? Absolutely not!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition was Prime Minister of this country and he is saying that closing a Mission means that we are disconnecting our ties to those countries. Come on! Mr. Speaker, Sir, closing an embassy or a diplomatic mission does not mean that we are disconnecting our ties with those countries. Absolutely not! There are other diplomatic missions that will have accreditation to those countries or those institutions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Minister for Economy in his Budget Address made it absolutely clear the other Missions that will be making accreditations to Missions in those countries. This is what bothers me, the quality of leadership on the other side and what will happen to the country, God bless.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Professor Prasad raised his concern about the \$100 million a month of debt servicing expenditure. The Honourable Professor Prasad is back on his usual habit of misleading the public for personal gain. You take and choose and emotionalise those issues you think would be quite easily palatable to the ordinary Fijians, you should realise that the ordinary Fijians are much, much more educated now and they can identify and separate lies from the truth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Professor Prasad did inform the House that \$500 million in debt repayment was incurred by the SDL Government. The debt servicing that this Government is undertaking now is for the debt that was incurred a long time back, that is how it is. If the Honourable Professor Prasad excludes the debt servicing of \$500 million that we are doing to the SDL Government, then we would only have to service \$50 million per month now than what we are currently doing of \$100 million per month.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Professor Prasad will not inform the House about the one lump sum bond payment of \$430 million that was taken by the SDL Government. He will not tell the House that this Government has already accumulated \$430 million in the Sinking Fund to pay back that bond amount. So, why is Honourable Professor Prasad not informing the House? Because that will show how prudent this Government is and will then oppose what the Honourable Leader of the Opposition said in running down the Budget, he will go back and say that what the Honourable



Leader of the Opposition said on that day was true. It is, indeed, a prudent Budget. Honourable Professor Prasad would do justice to give the full story rather than just peddling lies and half-truths.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if one goes and talks to any first year economic student about debt, you do not talk about debt in absolute numbers, you talk about debt relative to the size of the economy. For example, if a household wants to borrow \$50,000 and if their annual income is \$10,000 or \$20,000, then that amount is quite large. But if the household income is about a quarter million dollars a year, then borrowing \$50,000 is nothing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, always, when you talk about debt, you talk about debt in relation to the size of the economy because then only you can say whether the country has the ability to pay back the debt. That is why, whenever you talk about debt, you say debt to GDP ratio or debt national income ratio, because you want to know whether that particular debt is payable or not. We should not come into this House and start throwing in numbers to just say that the debt level is so high.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you really want to talk about debt level, talk about debt of countries, like America, which is over 100 percent. What is the debt to GDP ratio of the small States in the African Region? Not 40 percent, not 50 percent, not 60 percent, not 70 percent, not 90 percent, not 100 percent, but over 100 percent.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- He is saying they can afford it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had just spent a good three minutes of my time in saying that your ability to repay is based on your ability or the size of the economy. So, debt to GDP ratio, debt to national income ratio, and here he is saying that if it is over 100 percent they can afford it.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- There you go! Once you become Attorney-General.

(Laughter)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- There you go! This is the quality government we are going to have.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, why is Honourable Professor Prasad ignoring the cost of borrowing? When you talk about borrowing, you also need to talk about the cost of borrowing because the cost of borrowing will add to our ability to service. It is not only the principal amount that we will pay back, but we will also have to pay the cost of borrowing which is the interest rate.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the history of Fiji, no Government was able to access money at the cost that this Government is able to get it now. The Honourable Minister for Economy clearly explained that for the first time ever, he was able to negotiate and get certain loans without any interest rates. Never before has it happened, this is the first time ever.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, whenever we say, "...for the first time we were able to do that", it pains them, and you see their heads are down, they are very unhappy. This is Budget response, so you need to understand that.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is the same Honourable Professor Prasad, who today is arguing that we should put more money to the people who have lost jobs, we have not done justice, and it is the same Honourable Professor Prasad who said, "cut civil servants' pay". The same person is saying that we should give more money to people and the same person is saying that our civil servants should have a pay cut. They will never ever forgive him, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Kuridrani accused our Honourable Prime Minister and the Minister for Sugar for lack of knowledge to revive the industry. He also argued that our farmers should produce 90 tonnes per hectare. The first question I would ask Honourable Kuridrani is, out of the 110 countries that are producing sugar, where is Fiji ranked in terms of farm productivity or farm yield? Where are we?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Kuridrani has no idea on what could be the potential level of farm productivity or farm yield. He is talking about 90 tonnes per hectare on an average farm productivity about 10 years ago which was about 10 tonnes per acre.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the last 10 years, this Government has worked hard to raise the farm productivity substantially. Honourable Kuridrani is talking about raising the farm productivity to 90 tonnes per hectare. He should ask the Honourable Leader of the Opposition on how he killed confidence in the sugar industry in 1987 by convincing the landowners not to renew their leases.

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- No, no, very bitter!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and my fellow colleague, Honourable Nawaikula, who was part of the ITLTB went around and telling the landowners, "Take your land back, you will make massive amount of money."

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

I need to clarify that, Mr. Speaker. He is accusing me of going to the landowners.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I demand he withdraws it.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- No, no!

HON. SPEAKER.- What is your Point of Order?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Misleading the House, Mr. Speaker. I am entitled under Standing Order 80 something to clarify a misrepresentation that he actually made.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- He said something which is a total lie and it is not true. He should withdraw it. Withdraw it, please. Withdraw it or get out.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- He is accusing me of something that I did not do.

HON. SPEAKER.- What is the misleading part of that statement?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- He said that I went to the landowners and tell them not to renew their leases...

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- That is true!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ...which is a total lie. There is no evidence in relation to that, nothing! So I am asking you, Mr. Speaker, to demand that he withdraws that.

HON. SPEAKER.- You do not really want my opinion on what you are talking about, do you?

You have the floor, Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, 1987 was the beginning of an era where confidence in the sugar industry and the agriculture sector started to fall. The Honourable Leader of the Opposition knows very well how people moved from the sugar industry and the agriculture sector and how the squatter settlements came into being. The squatter settlements are there today, thanks to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker. Now, he is accusing me as the cause of the squatter settlements.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- No, I did not mention your name.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- How can I be the reason for all those people living in the squatter settlements? He must be mad.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Not you!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I think he is out of his mind.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- May be he forgot his medicine.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, he is not accusing you of that at all. He is accusing you of other things, but not that.

You have the floor, Honourable Member.

(Laughter)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, today we are struggling to get young people into agriculture because they have lost confidence in the agriculture sector due to the expiry of land leases and non-renewable of land leases. If you drive from Labasa Town towards Wainikoro, you will see large tracts of land under bush, these are the land where leases were not renewed. Farmers have to move out and now was not renewed, under the pretext that landowners shall takeover and cultivate.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you drive in Nadi, Savusavu back road to Nalia, Marasa, you will see large tracts of land under bush because these land were under sugarcane production before. The young generation do not want to come back to agriculture because they say that, again, the leases may not renewed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that was the beginning of the demise of agriculture and fall in agriculture productivity. And today, Honourable Kuridrani had the audacity to come and say that the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Sugar lacks the knowledge and ability to raise the productivity of the sugar industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Sugar, in 2008, he established the Committee for Better Utilisation of Land (CBUL) to start the renewal of leases and put land under productive use. Under the leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister, the efficiency in conversion of cane to sugar productivity improved.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Member said that during this period, sugar increased. Sugar was at a \$400 million loss. We all know that. Every single year, the Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC) has been at a loss, at a loss and at a loss. Up until now, FSC lost \$400 million. So tell the truth!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

Honourable Member, he is saying that. If he is wrong, he is wrong. It does not permit a Point of Order.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- If I am wrong and you have your time, your colleagues can stand up and show facts and figures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the agriculture sector has turned around. You have not seen how the sugar industry has turned around. You will not, because you do not like to see good things.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Where is the Agro Marketing Report?

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are now commercialising the agriculture sector, big time! I will present to this House next year the numbers to demonstrate how our export sector has

grown. I will produce numbers to this House to demonstrate how much new land has been brought under agriculture and how the agriculture productivity has risen.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Members on the other side are talking about more money to agriculture. Did we ever hear from them suggestions as to how smartly we can do agriculture? Never! They are talking about more sugarcane price. Have you ever heard from them to say how farmers can reduce cost efficiency and increase productivity? Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the same price, farmers can even make more unit profit, if they are able to increase productivity and reduce cost.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the overall strategy in the agriculture sector - bringing more land, commercialise agriculture, improve productivity, reduce cost, expand the market, deepen the market and do undertake product depreciation so that we can bring in more consumers in the export market.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is the overall strategy. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Honourable Jese Saukuru.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate on the 2020-2021 Budget financial year that was presented by the Honourable Minister for Economy in this august House on 17th July, 2020. Let me begin by sharing the Lord's reconciliation message to mankind on II Chronicles 7:14, and I quote:

“If my people who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to quote from the *Daily Hansard* of 18th June, 2019, when the 2019-2020 Budget was debated in this august House by quoting what Mr. Arthur Schopenhauer said, and I quote:

“All truth passes through three stages:

- (1) It is ridiculed;
- (2) It is violently opposed; and
- (3) It is accepted as self-evident.”

Mr. Speaker, it is now self-evident that the reduction in the Budget last year was a red flag, indicating the Bainimarama doom. Sir, let us face reality; the fact that our economy was already in recession before the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the much talked about Bainimarama boom and unprecedented growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, judging from previous Budget presentations, we were not expecting the Honourable Minister for Economy neither the FijiFirst Government, to provide the necessary remedy to our ailing national economy. Sir, here, we have a nation in crisis and we need to urgently restructure our economy or make bold changes or a paradigm shift in the way we do things to revitalise our struggling economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Budget is an insult to the people of Fiji, and an act of betrayal by the FijiFirst Government upon the people of Fiji. The Budget is irresponsible, rudderless and deceiving. It is paving the way forward to an unprecedented socio-economic and geo-political disaster which will render this nation and its people to bankruptcy.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J. SAUKURU.- It is too expansionary and does not give policymakers direction as to how expenditures are to be implemented to achieve the desired outcome that we all want.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the people of Fiji, allow me to dwell on some facts about our economy:

- (1) Fiji's average growth for the last 10 years from 2011 to 2020 was only 0.75 percent, so where is the boastfulness of unprecedented growth, but failure through misinformation and manipulation?
- (2) At least 115,000 people have lost their jobs in the formal sector (excluding underemployment and those in the informal sector).
- (3) More than half of Fiji's population are facing extreme hardship.
- (4) A total of 101,879 withdrawal applications were processed by the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF) and a total of \$71.7 million was paid through the COVID-19 withdrawal scheme and unemployment benefits.
- (5) Job advertisement contracted by 48.8 percent.
- (6) The removal of duties and tariff will penalise our local industry, which will have impact on employment and investment.
- (7) Why the false hope and anticipation for the 'Bula Bubble' when borders are closed?
- (8) On average, Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) receives \$600 million annually. The \$348.9 million is the amount normally allocated prior to the 2006 *coup*.
- (9) Capacity of implementation and targeting of projects is questionable.
- (10) How relevant are these capital projects in direct response to COVID-19 when funds should be directed to priority areas, levy.
- (11) Funding must address the urgent need for those who have lost their jobs. Our people urgently need income support.
- (12) The restructure and reform programme has been ongoing for the last 10 years and has failed miserably.
- (13) The marginalisation of the iTaukei – reference made to legislations in place, undermining the inspiration and self-determination of the iTaukei.
- (14) Poverty will continue to increase.
- (15) Law and order situation is appalling with an elite group of untouchables.

- (16) The deteriorating basic infrastructure, like roads, hold testimony to the status of our economy.
- (17) Government continues to borrow excessively from \$2.5 billion in 2006 to \$8.3 billion in 2020.
- (18) Our future generation will be burdened to pay all those debts, therefore, they cannot borrow anymore with the current debt per capita of \$9,304.
- (19) Development will be much slower while other countries will be progressing as Fiji will be left behind paying its debts.

On rural and maritime development, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in respect of the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, there is an increase of capital expenditure from the revised estimate in 2019-2020 of \$5.3 million to \$5.8 million. While we welcome that aspect of this Budget, it is our hope that the long and outstanding community project proposals by provincial and advisory councils will be implemented with urgency rather than lip service.

Sir, people cannot afford to be suffering due to no fault of their own when the Government cannot take care of simple things, such as water, electricity, drains, peace and order, job creation and improvement of our road infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, today 413,000 people or about 45.5 percent of our total population in 2017 reside in our rural areas. Many rural communities have yet to share the fruits of economic growth and development. Most rural communities are still denied access to basic services and utilities. Less than two-thirds of rural households have access to tap water, with the balance depending on rivers and wells for this basic right. Rural villages and settlements are still undeveloped in terms of water supply and sanitation. The major challenge is to create an environment conducive to attract investment and opportunities for a better quality of life for our rural communities.

To reinvigorate and strengthen our rural development effort, a SODELPA Government is committed to empower our rural and outer island communities to fulfil their aspirations and self-determination through the development of better infrastructure, improved utilities and opportunities to develop their natural resources. The implementation of the Rural and Outer Island (ROI) Development Programme, will be revisited, reviewed and realigned to the current need of our rural and outer island communities.

On Disaster Management and Meteorological Services, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we wish to record our concern on the removal of Head 14 and the reallocation of Disaster Management to Head 18 and Meteorological Services to Head 40 respectively.

I wish to thank the Government of New Zealand and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) for their continued support through aid in kind of \$3.9 million. We emphasise the need to maintain rivers and streams, drainage systems and water outlets to mitigate risks to life and property.

Sir, similar to climate change, in his response to questions regarding the Employment Relations (Amendment) Bill 2020, the Honourable Minister for Economy declared that the COVID-19 pandemic is an act of God. Why the sudden change to blame God when you have alienated God from our Constitution and the institutions of Government?

The preamble of the 1997 Constitution says, and I quote:

“We, the people of the Fiji Islands, seeking the blessing of God who has always watched over these islands”.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since Independence, God was always an important part of Government and its policies until the FijiFirst Government.

Sir, in the wake of the 2011 Japan earthquake and tsunami, a pastor by the name of Dr. Erwin Lutzer said, and I quote:

“One thing we have to remember is that the world is fallen. The Bible says that when man fell into sin, all of nature was cursed. In other words, it was impossible for a sinful man to live in a perfect environment of paradise, so all of nature is cursed.”

Natural disasters are a megaphone from God and they teach us various lessons. First of all, natural disasters show us the uncertainty of life. Thousands of people wake up in the morning not knowing what is going to happen that day and we cannot get away from the reality that life is very, very short and it is possible for us to delude ourselves.”

The FijiFirst Government introduced the issue of a “Secular State” in the 2013 Constitution. A SODELPA Government will review the Constitution to ensure that the following are addressed:

- (1) ensure God’s rightful place in our supreme law;
- (2) uphold Christian principles and values; and
- (3) ensure respect for all religious faiths and religious freedom for all citizens.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. J. SAUKURU.- The country is more vulnerable than ever before from both natural and man-made disasters. The regular occurrences and the high intensity of natural disasters in the last decades have adversely affected all sectors of our economy. Their effects include; lower domestic production, reduced employment opportunities, increased health problems and pressure on prices particularly basic food items.

A SODELPA Government will take a more holistic and integrated approach in addressing disaster management. The focus of its policy will be on mitigation and adaptation rather than reactionary, which is the current practice.

On the pine industry, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will continue to address the plight of the pine landowners as it lies very close to the heart of my Province. On Page 43 of the Budget Supplement, it clearly shows that Government still owns 99.8 percent while Fiji Pine Trust, on behalf of the Pine landowners, continues to hold a minority share of 0.2 percent, together with a dividend right. Successive governments mooted the idea of gradually enabling the landowners’ participation in business and to assume the ownership of the pine industry in Fiji. I call on the Honourable Minister for Forests to please, do the right thing and allow the landowners through the Fiji Pine Trust, to gradually redeem Government shares from the 70 percent lease security bonus held back by Fiji Pine Limited.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!



HON. J. SAUKURU.- Sir, in keeping our trust with our voters and being faithful advocates of the resource owners and the original pledge that was made to them by the then government, I regard it as our duty as the most loyal opposition to the people of Fiji, to announce here and now that a SODELPA Government will seek to promote the interests and aspirations of the resource owners in the forestry sector, inclusive of pine and mahogany, as stipulated under UNDRIP and ILO Convention 169.

On water supply, allow me, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to begin with the issue of imminent danger of a drought and water supply to drought-prone areas. If you look at the provisions made in the Budget, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Water Authority of Fiji has been allocated a total of \$195.4 million. We further note that the allocation for the Rural Water Scheme Programme is now reduced from \$11.3 million in the last revised estimate to \$6.4 million in this Budget.

Mr. Speaker Sir, it only depicts that despite all these talks of unprecedented GDP growth and more than a decade of liberalisation and modernisation, the fruits of these developments and growths have not resulted into any meaningful change in terms of the quality of life and the standard of living of our people. They remain the same, except a few who have acquired wealth and are more richer than they were a decade ago, while others suffer to have access to basic human necessity, such as water supply.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what I am trying to impress to the House by way of this statement is the need for this Government to take swift action on the following matters:

- (1) Draw up a plan of action and if there is such a plan of action, review and update the same in respect of contingency, water supply in a drought situation or to drought-stricken areas.
- (2) Empower the people in prone to drought stricken areas through water harvesting and conservation measures to address a situation of contingency in case of delay in supply.
- (3) Development of micro-managed regional water schemes, instead of being heavily reliant on piped water supply by mainline from major dams or water catchment areas.
- (4) Seek to establish and enhance partnership with local stakeholders to resolve the problem of water wastage, harvest, sustainable use, management and conservation, including traditional methods.
- (5) Ensure that the \$3.5 million for rural water carting and \$4.8 million to improve water distribution systems are well-spent for the systematic planning and management of water supply in case of drought and prone to drought-stricken areas.

I am making those points very elaborately in this august House for a number of reasons. Firstly, water is a basic human need; secondly, there are some key strategic utilities which rely on water to operate, such as hospitals, schools, factories, businesses, ports and airports and after all, homes and hotels as well as restaurants and places of worship. Further to that, Fiji is a place of festivities, ceremonies and events where water supply is a must, failing which we expect disruptions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to remind Honourable Dr. Reddy, that he needs to focus on agriculture. Our people need to know what your plan is for Fiji. As usual, he is talking nonsense. I remind him to ask the farmers as to which Government gave them the best price for their sugarcane. It was the SVT Government that gave them the best price for their sugarcane.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will not mince my words, but tell this Government that they have little choice, experience or knowledge to deal with the crisis, they are battling to manage now after having taken Fiji down to the ....

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- A point of order, Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$85 a tonne was never ever given by any previous Government.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J. SAUKURU.- I will not mince my words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but to tell this government that they have little choice and experience or knowledge to deal with the crisis, they are battling to manage now after having taken Fiji down to the path of imminent bankruptcy.

Mr. Speaker, the first choice is to face the people or establish a broad-based multi-party government on national unity to pave the way forward. That should begin with the resignation of both, the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Minister for Economy, for they have lost the moral authority to manage our economy. The people of Fiji are also fed up with dictatorship and deception which have become the hallmark of the Bainimarama-led Government.

Let me echo Commodore Frank Bainimarama's (who is now the Honourable Prime Minister) comment that was reported in the *Fiji Times* on 8th November, 2006, and I quote:

"Let me say that corruption is about lies and in the indigenous context, the greatest lie is when it is told by a P.M., a *Talatala* [preacher] or a Chief for personal gain for the simple reason that these are the three entities that we hold dear and look up to for advice."

On the very next day, the *Fiji Sun* reported Commodore Bainimarama again, and I quote:

"We, in the RFMF, represent the silent majority of this land and say we are tired of being lied to. Stop now or our children and grandchildren will suffer."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, now, I speak for the silent majority who are listening on the radio, watching the TV and on livestream and say that we are tired of being lied to by the FijiFirst Government. It is the same Commodore Bainimarama (and now Honourable Prime Minister) who illegally took over a legitimate Government that had a debt of only \$2.5 billion, who is now the captain of the ship that would soon turn a submarine with \$8.3 billion. I wonder what the Honourable Prime Minister is still doing here when he should do the most honourable thing and resign.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, SODELPA would not be a party to anything that seeks to divide and destroy our nation and lead our economy and lives of the people of Fiji astray. As such, I wish to record my strong opposition to this Budget.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Jese Saukuru for his contribution to the debate.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament; I rise today in this august House to lend my full support to the 2020-2021 National Budget.

At the outset, I personally wish to congratulate the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy and his team for presenting to this august House and to the nation a bold and timely Budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as most countries across the globe slowly move into recovery phase, respective Governments are not only being tested on how effective they can address COVID-19 but more importantly, on how resilient they are in this recovery phase. As such, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for me, put very simply, this 2020-2021 National Budget is all about changing adversities into opportunities.

I will say again, the 2020-2021 National Budget, put very simply, is about changing adversities into opportunities and for that, it needs courage in the phase of adversities. Unfortunately, the Honourable Rasova is not here, we need courage not *rere* during these difficult times, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It requires bold, visionary and strategic leadership as opposed to the weak, irresponsible, rudderless and deceptive leadership on the other side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have said this so often in this House that during periods as such, we have to control our circle of influence. Let us not be overwhelmed by our circle of concerns. This is the time to put on the Tailevu mantra - "Push Tailevu. No bus fare, no problem, *paidar*." That is it, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We need that bold, visionary and strategic leadership to take us through this difficult period.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let us look within and believe in ourselves. Let us look into our own abilities and our own potentials. Let us believe in our own people and be patriotic about Fiji. That is what this whole 2020-2021 National Budget is about - it is about changing adversities into opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2020-2021 National Budget before the House provides Fiji the much-needed stimulant to support the recovery of our economy and most importantly, rebuild the livelihoods of all Fijians affected by calamities, namely; COVID-19 and *TC Harold*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, yet again, the other side of the House has continued to politicise the sufferings of ordinary Fijians who have been affected and that will be supported in the Budget before the House. We are talking about the situation that we are going through. They are already looking into 2022 because for them, it is all about elections and not about the issues that we have. They did this when we assisted Fijians during the COVID-19 Supplementary Budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and yet, again, have continued to echo the same rhetoric now and remain intensively blind to the realities of today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Government has yet, again, put Fiji first in our 2020-2021 National Budget in our efforts to boldly recover and rebuild better in this somewhat new normal world. To reiterate what the Honourable Prime Minister said, "This Budget gives out to where it is needed the most."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a lot of noise from the Opposition on Government debt. When we think of it, Fiji is not the only country borrowing now, especially the cushion, the impact of COVID-19 and certainly, we are not the only country with high debt level.

Let me just add a few lines to what the Honourable Minister for Agriculture has talked about on Honourable Professor Prasad's analysis of the Budget. But before that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me just clarify an issue raised by Honourable Qereqeretabua.

As Minister responsible, if the tinned fish that was part of the assistance package that was offered to the people of Kadavu is of inferior quality, we do convey our sincere apology to the recipients. However, let me state, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that here with me is the health certificate that brought that product into Fiji. What she was referring to is “Canned Mackerel in Tomato Sauce” or “Canned Mackerel in Vegetable Oil”.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Motibhai is the agent and we are governed by Government’s procurement policies. This contract is given to Motibhai and the above-mentioned goods are in conformity with sanitary requirements and fit for human consumption, but she was referring to what was banned in Malaysia.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what we have found out was that, what was banned in Malaysia was sardines. That is the difference between “sardines” and “canned mackerel in vegetable oil” or “canned mackerel in tomato sauce”. I need to clarify that because if it is “sardines”, unfortunately, the “canned sardines” is not here. Bring the “canned sardines” after this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That needs to be clarified because what was banned was “sardines” and not “mackerel in oil” or “mackerel in tomato sauce”.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, national debt is accumulation of debt across many years of different governments. In fact, there has been a very few instances of Government having a surplus budget. All governments have basically rolled over previous debts or loans. The truth is that, the Bainimarama-led Government has been clearing up the mess of previous politicians, who were focussed on certain gains instead of the interest of the Fijian people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bainimarama-led Government has been paying off the loans taken by the Alliance Government, the NFP Government and Fiji Labour Party Government, the SVT Government and SDL Government, not to mention the excessive interest rates charged on those loans.

When the Bainimarama-led Government took over, we inherited about \$2.5 billion of the previous Governments statistics. Since then, the Bainimarama-led Government has paid over \$2 billion just in interest, on the debt inherited, and every year, some of these inherited debt matures. The Bainimarama-led Government repays these debt by taking new debt, this is called “rolling-over debt”.

This is not something unique to Fiji but practised by other countries, including the United States of America, United Kingdom and Australia. Debt and interest payments are due every week. For Fiji, there is a large bond due in the next financial year, in October, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This debt was initially taken by the SDL Government in 2006, which the Bainimarama-led Government has rolled over twice.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to put things into better perspective, we can attribute almost \$500 million in debt repayments to loan decisions by the former SDL Government. We can now all see that Honourable Professor Prasad is twisting data to suit his own opinion. He should not misguide the Fijian people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, he should be truthful and say that half of the debt we are repaying today was a result of the loan taken by the SDL Government. But he will not say that, after all to do so, would be to put the SODELPA Party or the Honourable Leader of the Opposition down. If we were to exclude the debt by the former SDL Government, the debt serving is more than \$50 million.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will take this opportunity to perhaps, educate the other side of the House and our colleagues on the far side of the aisle on good economics. Firstly, he should know that it is not about the absolute amount, but percentage of that to GDP and that is the appropriate measure, Honourable Professor. The United States of America (USA), Japan, Italy and Singapore, which are all developed countries and economic powerhouses, have a debt to GDP ratio of over 100 percent. Fiji's debt although increasing because of COVID-19, is far safer.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the significant amount of Fiji's debt has been inherited from previous Governments, including the SDL Government or SODELPA Government which is due in October. But let me say this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Professor Prasad failed to acknowledge that \$430 million of debt serving which has already been saved and is sitting in Government's Sinking fund so money is already saved in the current financial year but will be paid in the new financial year.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I think I have had enough of that, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Well, a first-year student can teach a professor.

(Laughter)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me relate debt infrastructure. Let me refer to the Honourable Nawaikula or the Honourable Jonah. He was correct, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It was the Ratu Mara-led Government that was more into investment, and this Government, unfortunately, that is where he needs to be corrected, is more into consumption.

But let me say this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Tikoduadua will agree to this. When we started off with Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) in 2013, if I remember the year correctly, in one of the first briefings that was given to the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Ministers and the senior government officials, they talked about the poor state of infrastructure in Fiji that we inherited.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will just touch on bridges. We had about 609 bridges back then, I think it is more than a thousand now. Out of those figure that they gave of 609, 75 of those bridges were classified as "critical" and 120 more were classified as "urgent". Why was this, Mr. Speaker, Sir? For two obvious reasons; one is the overloading, but the other one was the lack of maintenance and the lack of investment into ill-infrastructure by previous Governments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the lifetime of a bridge is supposed to be 85 years, unfortunately, for bridges in Fiji, their average is only about 43 years and simply because of poor and lack of maintenance previously. That is what this Government inherited and we have discussed this so many times in this august House, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

This Government, again, is investing into our infrastructure and that is linked to our borrowing and, of course, to our debts as well. But when we are financing these infrastructure, definitely, governments that will come later will not have to do another highway from Bua to Dreketi.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me just touch on bridges again. I ask the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Nawaikula and the Honourable Bulitavu when they are next in Vanua

Levu that, firstly, we have just fixed the Vatudova Bridge. Secondly, you go to Korovuli now, Government is fixing the Korovuli Bridge, and past Korovuli, you will come to Vesidrua. The Government is fixing that bridge now. This is amongst the 75 and the 120 bridges that I was referring to, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

If you go past Vesidrua before the junction to Savusavu, that bridge (I do not know the name) is currently under construction now, Mr. Speaker, Sir. If you go down to Cakaudrove, the Balaga Bay, that bridge before Boy's Town is now under construction because of the critical stage they were in, or urgent because of lack of maintenance from previous years. But thankful to the FijiFirst Government, we are investing in our infrastructure for the good and the betterment of our Fijians tomorrow. So, there is no need for them to take more debts to build these bridges.

Of course, the roads, I will not go into the roads, the water and the jetties. Honourable Jale, we have fixed the jetty in Moala. Of course, that jetty has done its time and it has to be taken away. It is all there in the Government's plan, and we will look into that, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- This is the problem, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have mentioned this in previous Budgets. Now, we add "rere" to the strategic paralysis, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and that is why they are confused.

Government and private sector spending, Mr. Speaker, Sir; Government's spending is critical for our domestic economy. Government's spending alone is nearly 20 percent of our total GDP. What I want to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that the rest of our domestic spending is from the private sector. However, with high liquidity in the domestic market and the various initiatives in this Budget, it is anticipated and we hope that the private sector will seize the opportunity because this Budget is about changing our adversities into opportunities.

Micro and Small Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), Mr. Speaker, Sir; what saddens me is that, when we talk about assistances by Government, previously they always talk about freebies and freebies. That includes the \$1,000 grant.

But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we look at the Budget, while Government has scaled down on a number of programmes in the 2020-2021 Budget, it will continue with the existing initiatives and introduce new measures to support the unemployed through MSMEs and the tourism sector. Hopefully, Mr. Speaker, Sir, these \$1,000 grants would have grown and business threshold would have improved.

If I remember correctly \$7,000 is the minimum for them to acquire a loan because of the turnover, so it is very positive, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is not freebies but it is about a leg-up so that during these difficult times, if MSMEs are doing well, this is when they will grow and provide the much-needed employment in the various sectors, particularly in rural Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me touch on rural development. We have an allocation of \$16.6 million in the new financial year and the specifics will be covered by the Honourable Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Maritime Development. Of course, the Honourable Assistant Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services has talked briefly about disaster management.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government is not only supporting MSMEs but we are also heavily investing into our rural and maritime programmes across all sectors. I say that again, across all

sectors. In the 2020-2021 financial year, Government plans to invest a total of \$144 million in the rural and maritime sector.

The Honourable Saukuru is not here, he needs to hear this - \$144 million across all sectors and the breakdown is as follows:

- \$5 million in the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management;
- \$18 million in the Ministry of Agriculture;
- \$79 million with the Ministry of Infrastructure;
- \$3.6 million with the Ministry of Fisheries;
- \$4.1 million with the Ministry of Forests;
- \$1.8 million with the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources; and
- \$9 million with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have always said that with this Government, we ensure that no one is left behind. There is so much potential in rural Fiji but we need to create the environment. Unfortunately, and I have said this already in this House, prior to the 2014 General Election and again in 2018, the Opposition keeps telling the people of Fiji, “do not be fooled by the amount of developments going on in Fiji because that is the responsibility of every government.”

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Yes, because we are doing it so well, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Yet they are asking, where is the money? Talking about freebies, we have done a lot for rural Fijian communities and we will continue to do that, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, as I have previously echoed in this august House, national security is vital for economic security and development, and this brings me to the mandate provided to me as the Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing. Again, I just need to acknowledge the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) and the Fiji Police Force (FPF), Mr. Speaker, Sir. For the FPF, we welcome this increase.

I have toured the Stations, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and going back to the infrastructure, unfortunately, the Labasa Police Station and all the Police Stations all over Fiji were built during Ratu Mara days. We talk about police brutality. Look at the environment that they are working in. Fiji has grown over the years, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Rural to urban drift is a global phenomenon and not only that, development comes with its price but we need to create the environment for our police officers.

I will not go into the details and that is why for the new police stations, they are not actually new so to speak, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because these are roll over from last year. If you go to Lautoka now, it is almost halfway, Mr. Speaker, Sir. If you go to Nadi, it should be ready by December this year if things go according to plan or otherwise the latest. This is according to and if we get the supplies by February next year. The new Nadi Police Station will be a state-of-the-art station, Mr. Speaker, Sir, so we are thankful to the contribution.

The RFMF, during COVID-19, acted well strategically, Sir, for the Fijian Government and I thank them for the allocation, of course, given to the Naval Division.

I wish to also thank the Government for giving us funding, particularly for our fight against drugs. In Kadavu alone, Mr. Speaker, Sir, not targeting Kadavu but with the use of two drones in

Kadavu, we confiscated about \$89 million worth of marijuana just by the use of two drones. This is why the allocation given to the FPF is justified and the need for the new police stations, not only will see money circulating in the construction industry but it will also create employment and most importantly, create the environment for our police officers so that they can excel in the work that they do.

Let me conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this pandemic has taught us a valuable lesson in recognising that non-traditional threats has the capacity to maim the global economy which, in turn, affects the security paradigm. I still do not see Honourable Saukuru in this House. I wanted to just remind him that he has quoted from 2 Chronicles 7:14, so I suggest that he goes back one verse before that, Verse 13 which says, and I quote: “When I shut up the heavens and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send a plague among my people.” Then verse 14 comes on. But, Mr. Speaker, is it an act of God?

I do believe that God allows this pandemic so that we can draw closer to Him, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Irrespective of how the Opposition has labelled the Budget before the House, it does not take away the fact that this is a well thought-out Budget; a Budget that is for the people and boldly designed to change the adversities of this pandemic into opportunities for the greater prosperity of all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with that contribution, I close by reiterating my full support for the 2020-2021 National Budget. *Vinaka saka vakalevu.*

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing for his statement.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Lynda Tabuya. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the Budget Address by the Honourable Minister for Economy delivered last Friday in this esteemed House. I cannot promise to be louder than the Honourable Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing. However, much has been correctly stated from this side of the House about the incompetencies and failures of the FijiFirst Government in its monetary and fiscal policies over the last few years that has seen our economy tank when COVID-19 hit.

The Government in the last few budgetary allocations have put eggs in two main baskets; tourism and sugar. After listening to the Budget being announced by the Honourable Minister for Economy, all I can say is that it lacks vision. It is rudderless, that is right!

It is like a ship in the Bermuda Triangle, going round and round in circles until it disappears. Of course, this is what will happen if we do not find the rudder, if we do not set a new course and if we do not find a destination, one that is safe and secure for its passengers and our people.

Speaking of ships, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think Honourable Maharaj was very, very loud and clear that this side of the House is in a sinking ship and that side of the House is a tight ship with its captain going forward successfully in that ship. Let me just ask Honourable Maharaj to ask their captain what happened when he was captaining the ship in the Lautoka Harbour a few years ago.

Now, despite the Opposition warning the Government year-in and year-out saying, “diversify and invest”, the Government did not listen. Even in this budget with COVID-19 which, by the way, the Honourable Minister for Health is possibly being air-borne, so that is not from Lynda-land, affecting the entire world and has shut borders, stop mass movement of people, aeroplanes, cruise



ships, yachts and tested the resilience of countries' economies and one thing is evident, this Government still has no new ideas and has not even engaged in the innovative thinking of really looking inward and seeing Fiji for what it has to offer today that we can focus on right now to help our economy and our people grow. They are still focusing on tourism and sugar.

It is clear that the Government has run out of steam and they have got no new ideas. Mr. Speaker, Sir, 14 years is too long for any Government to remain in control. This is the reason why the most powerful country in the world, America, only allows the President to run for eight years.

The Government has plateaued and are on the very fast decline in terms of fresh ideas, innovation, motivation and spending habits. When COVID-19 has taught most of us to tighten spending, be frugal, recycle and reuse, the Government continues to prioritise its own expenditure to see an ever-increasing deficit, insensitive to the daily experiences of our people.

When the Honourable Prime Minister travels to cut ribbons, other Ministers, the Assistant Ministers, Permanent Secretaries and Government personnel all follow, which is contributing to huge overheads and wastage. When our people struggle daily with providing the bare necessities, like nutritious food, adequate housing and affordable medicine, the Government announces in this Budget that it is going to build the Prime Minister's new office.

Our people are our greatest assets, not just for tourists, but more importantly in times of crisis, an amazing resilience that can be attributed to the deep sense of spirituality and faith that God is charge, that you cannot trust the Government anymore to take care of you, because the Government is in the business of treating its greatest assets, its people, like chattels, like property, to be used and discarded at will.

Just ask the frontline workers in the tourism industry, the many hundreds of Air Terminal Services (ATS) workers and Fiji Airways workers who were sent home in the most inhumane way, with redundancy packages and back pay owed for years, the very same workers who, last year, were dancing around an A350 aeroplane, right in the middle of the measles epidemic, showing their dedication to the cause then. What now of them, or are they someone else's problem now, left to join the long line at the employment tribunal to find relief for their claims? Is this how we treat our greatest assets, our people? Is this the legacy, the Honourable Prime Minister, wants to be known for? When SODELPA becomes the government, we will right these injustices.

The people are taking care of the people. An initiative pioneered by the people, taking us to the old ways of bartering, has seen thousands of our people bartering online to help and assist the needy and to trade with commodities that are easily available to them. I commend the initiatives 'Barter for Better Fiji' as well as 'Swap it Viti', where our Honourable Minister for Education is a regular, and I thank her for that.

I also commend the countless community efforts, *na solesolevaki*, when the community comes together and embarks on projects to help our people in need, whether it is providing groceries, school lunches, school supplies, transport, feeding the homeless, providing skills and trade, building or repairing homes, visiting the sick, the disabled, the widows and the fatherless - our values of love, compassion and kindness are prevalent and fostering greater relationships between our people, void of race and religion.

This is the model, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we should be looking at as a nation to move our country forward, the values that we are known for: *veimasulaki*, *veisikovi*, *veinanumi*, *veimaroroi*, *veilomani* – the universal values that connect people and connect hearts, the economics of humanity and godliness. This time of COVID-19 tests our people's resilience, but it has automatically invoked

our deep sense of community, our deep sense of spirituality, our collective tolerance, our collective long suffering, but also our collective will to do better, to be better and to demand better.

So how can we, as a nation, do better? Let us redefine ourselves. We need a revolution, a revolution of ideas, a complete paradigm shift from global to local ...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Agriculture.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- You did not talk about that in your Budget speech.

... from traditional and western forms of work back to our primary industries, agriculture, forestry and fisheries. I was quite disappointed with the Honourable Minister for Agriculture's contribution. I was waiting in anticipation to hear what he had planned for our country, but nothing came out there.

Now Honourable Viam Pillay, in his speech, still referred to backyard gardening and farm support as stated in the Budget. But we need to stop seeing agriculture as a 'food only' industry, but one that can drive many other complimentary industries, like manufacturing, clothing and textiles, medicine and cosmetics.

The Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment talked about not hearing from us on how to work smarter. Well, I will tell you how to work smarter, Honourable Minister, by redirecting money from wastage to your Ministry. I call this agriculture revolution, "Let's grow Fiji". With the same patriotism, zeal and passion that we cheer our rugby team, "Let's go Fiji, let's go!" Let us revolutionise our patriotism, our zeal, our passion, to become a self-sustaining, self-reliant, self-determining people using the natural assets with which God has blessed us with. Let us grow Fiji, let us grow!

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- It will take political will and it is not coming from that side, prioritising in the National Budget our primary industries. When SODELPA becomes government in 2022, we will revolutionise our country to diversify into many baskets, not putting our eggs in two baskets, like the FijiFirst Government has done all along, with under 10 percent of the GDP to agriculture.

The Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF) which has largely invested in tourism and property development, needs to reprioritise and invest in our primary industries. Fiji Investment Corporation needs to be quickly re-established to provide better equity investment capital for start-up businesses in priority industries, including agriculture.

New Zealand, in its budget this year, has committed into generating a whopping \$44 billion over the next 10 years from their primary industries. Why has the FijiFirst Government not made a similar commitment to substantially grow our primary industry? Why? Because it is not and has never been a priority for them to lift our people out of poverty in the way they know that will empower and sustain our people in the long run.

Free education is all very well, but are we educating our children with skills and knowledge to equip them to sustain their livelihoods and families in the future? With sugar on a global decline and our own Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC) making loss after loss, is it not time to look at alternatives to sugar and bring Fiji into the 21st century?

It is time to grow Fiji by focusing on the primary industry and in niche markets. As our Honourable Leader of the Opposition stated, we are not capitalising on our competitive advantage. Here, we can become the highest-quality player using our rapidly-growing international reputation and pristine environment as our marketing strength. Fiji Water and Pure Fiji are great examples.

What else can Fiji produce to take advantage of our high-quality brand? How about bananas, guavas, mangoes and the world's best pineapples or organic fresh juices, organic coconut water and milk, essential oils, organic fertilizer, organic seaweed for food and medicine, cosmetic products, gluten-free flour from cassava, *dalo* and breadfruit, fish and other high-end seafood, cocoa, coffee, moringa, honey and vanilla. The primary sector offers great hope for the country because Fiji is blessed with many natural resources, plenty of unencumbered land, sunshine, clean water and a strong and capable workforce who are used to working together in communal settings.

FijiFirst has not prioritised the agriculture sector which has been in decline over the last decade or so. It still remains important to the nation's economy for income generation and food security. Accounting for 9.5 percent of Fiji's GDP, the sector supports the livelihoods of almost half of Fiji's population who reside in rural areas which is over 150,000 working Fijians.

We produce a variety of traditional crops, including sugarcane, *dalo*, coconuts, cassava and sweet potatoes but unfortunately, we face major shortages of fruits and vegetables. The market is often unable to supply the local demand, particularly following natural disasters. As a result of inconsistent supply and lower than ideal quality, vegetables and fruits are often imported.

Let me tell you this, Honourable Minister for Agriculture. Last year alone, Fiji imported over \$300 million worth of vegetables and fruit products.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- You did not know that.

Any significant economic growth in Fiji must include the agricultural sector. While large scale commercial agriculture projects are needed, fast implementation projects can significantly increase Fiji's productivity in the short term, which is what we need right now. Building the capacity of rural communities to diversify agriculture to higher value crops and commercial agriculture will improve on and off farm livelihoods and opportunities for processing and value addition.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- The Honourable Minister for Agriculture is making noise now; I am speaking. To do so, Fiji will have to improve its smallholder farmers' production. There is a need for a faster and sustainable solution, Honourable Minister, to promote the creation of commercial farming and improve agriculture productivity among traditional farmers.

After extensive discussion and consultation which I hope he is doing, a SODELPA government's vision will involve two major investment initiatives to deliver both the Know-How and the Do-How required to kick-start our agricultural revolution.

Let me tell you the Know-How. First in the Know-How, we envision establishing agro centres across the country. This is a unique concept, Honourable Speaker, where each agro centre will support thousands of smallholder farmers.

Why smallholder farmers? Because large diversification of production and crops, climate and market conditions, and growing local and international demands, hold back smallholder farmers in Fiji who find it difficult to reach a sustainable profitability. Small-scale farmers in Fiji's rural areas, which are the overwhelming majority of our farmers have very limited access to the assets that would facilitate a shift from subsistence farming to modern and commercial agriculture.

With low incomes on the farms, many rural young men and some women leave their villages for urban centres. This migration leads to an aging and generally less dynamic population in rural areas. High rates of youth unemployment and social disparities also heighten the danger of social tension.

The Agro Centre Concept objective is to improve the performance and profitability of smallholder farms by turning them into commercial ones. The centre would offer convenient and easy access to knowledge, services and markets.

On projected budget and return, according to initial calculations, the total cost for the establishment of one agro centre will be approximately \$30 million and take one year to set up. From similar agro centres already established in other countries, Mr. Speaker, we estimated an average income of approximately \$30,000 per year per farmer.

Conservatively, if each centre assisted and serviced only 1,000 farmers, the total income generated by these farmers would approximately be \$30 million per year and over 10 years amounts to \$300 million of total income generated from each centre. So, if we set up five agro centres across the country, costing us about \$150 million, they would generate our farmers over \$1.5 billion in income over the next 10 years, a phenomenal return on investment from anyone's perspective. Surely, we can find \$150 million in our budget to launch such an impressive self-sustaining initiative.

Now, to the Do-How, the Know-How is delivered through these agro centres which will lift productivity and quality of our smallholder farmers. We live in a tropical, marine environment with warm year-round temperatures where we often experience cyclones and heavy floods. This suggests that protected cultivation as in modern agriculture practices is a must in any future agro project.

A SODELPA government will look to set up 14 provincial greenhouse hubs - one in every province in Fiji. This is a unique concept, Honourable Prime Minister, designed to enable production of high quality fruits and vegetables by smallholder farmers. The greenhouses in each hub will operate as profitable commercial projects and will finance each agro centre's ongoing operational costs.

Traditional smallholder farmers, Mr. Speaker, Sir, struggle to reach the necessary quality standards and achieve profitability and sustainability. Protected cultivation, which is basically vegetable production in greenhouses, net houses and plastic tunnels, combined with professional management, allows them to reach that quality.

Protected cultivation offers some clear advantages over other agricultural activities:

- A positive cash-flow starting in just three months from planting and even in a cyclone, you can just open up the greenhouse and let the cyclone take the produce, then start again;
- High profitability per hectare;

- Highest quality year-round production, suitable for high-end markets and exports;
- Relatively low water consumption;
- Efficient use of soil;
- Intensive labour which is great for employment; and
- Relatively low use of mechanisation.

Each hub will train all farmers to participate in it. Training will be both, theoretical and practical, and the farmers will finance their stay through work in the greenhouses. Once each training session ends, the trained farmers will return to their homes where a provincial greenhouse hub project will be established to start their own activity.

The hubs farmers are members of the same co-operative. Each farmer will hold a share in the co-operative and will be entitled to an individual greenhouse plot, initially of 500 square metres, including all logistic and technical support, as well as post-harvest and marketing services.

Mr. Speaker, the farmers' income derives from its plots productivity after deducting expenses and investments, again, about \$30,000 per year per farmer. To establish a total of 14 provincial greenhouse hubs would cost a total of \$210 million and would employ 3,000 to 4,000 people and generate over \$50 million a year in revenue and \$0.5 billion of income over the next decade. A very respectable return on investment.

Again, I am sure we can find \$210 million dollars either from budget savings or additional borrowings to fund this enormous revenue and employment generator for each of our provinces and its rural citizens as an integral part of kick-starting Fiji's Agro Revolution.

Now, in doing this, together, our proposal to create five agro centres and 14 provincial greenhouse hubs would cost approximately \$360 million, which turns out to be about \$90 million per year over the next four years. Incidentally, it is about the same amount we spend on the military.

Doing this would put thousands of people to work in our rural communities, upgrade skills and living standards and generate \$2 billion in new-found income over the next decade. This would, in turn, help with funding adequate housing, and the quality of our local government services because right now, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Housing is the Ministry of power. Almost the whole budget is under "R".

This is the out of the box solution, focused thinking and spending that this Government cannot conceptualise, let alone, realise. Our SODELPA government will bring this to advance our nation, protect our people and assets from the next pandemic and kick-start a revolution. Let us grow Fiji agro. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Lynda Tabuya for her statement.

I give the floor to the Honourable Rohit Sharma to make his statement. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament; *namaste* and *bula vinaka* to you all. I rise today to give my contribution towards the 2020-2021 National Budget.

First and foremost, I wish to take this opportunity to personally thank the Ministry of Economy, in particular for this responsible and commendable Budget for this fiscal year.

A special gratitude goes to the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Attorney General and Minister for Economy for their foresight and love for the people of our nation, and these attributes are reflected in the 2020-2021 Budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are in the midst of a fast evolving pandemic in Fiji and around the world. We have made the decision to protect each other. We have quickly adapted. We now wear masks. We wash our hands more often. We maintain a safe social distance. As a result, thousands have stayed safe. We remain deeply concerned about the path of this virus, but we are, in common grounds with other countries that have adopted a stringent rule for lockdown, trying our very best to flatten the curve and save lives. As the wise farmer will tell you, when the temperature is rising, you must protect your plants from damage.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Honourable Prime Minister is a wise farmer, caring for our beloved country. The storm is not over, but we need to follow the health guidelines and make the right decisions to prepare us for a new global reality soon.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have many strengths. These include our young and ambitious people, our institutions, a robust and vibrant democracy, an independent judiciary and our commitment to social justice progress and our economic strengths.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it gives me immense pleasure and privilege to highlight some of the key components that the Budget offers to all our fellow Fijians. This Budget is definitely for the absolute majority of our population and it must have taken a herculean effort to prepare, considering all dimensions.

I must commend the efforts by our Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, in presenting such a balanced Budget with enormous opportunities for growth and development for our fellow Fijians. Indeed, this Budget speaks volumes about the FijiFirst Government's efforts and commitment towards the sustainability of natural and human resource development.

Realistically, it is imperative that all aspects of Fiji's national development are sustainable, inclusive, resilient and low carbon, considering the fact that FijiFirst Government is on the frontline of the global campaign in our efforts towards tackling this COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and its implications.

In my perspective, I strongly believe that this Budget has been prepared using the microscopic version, covering all key aspects of the economy, such as education, health, technological advancement, welfare, infrastructure, environment and tourism. This is a bold Budget indeed.

I seriously feel that this Budget has been prepared on the basis of high intelligence, equity and vision and does not have much space and opportunity for the Honourable Members of the Opposition and even the general public to criticise.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have been travelling throughout the country after the Budget announcement and I was overwhelmed by the fact that wherever I went, the people I met were overjoyed with the 2020-2021 Budget that was presented. It was evident that the public at large was satisfied with the commitment by the Government. There were numerous rumours with negative connotations about the recent Budget prior to its announcement that was spreading faster than COVID-19. However, it was a different story altogether when the Budget was tabled.

People were full of smiles with new hopes and aspirations towards a better and secured future for themselves and their children. That has been one of the major commitments of the FijiFirst

Government that I believe is true democracy, transparency, equality without any form of discrimination, such as gender, ethnicity or our socio-economic background.

The 2020-2021 Budget has revealed Government's commitment towards a bright and secured future for us all. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe that there have been prudent and disciplined financial decisions made to ensure that we achieve a balance in terms of expenditures, revenues and investments with strong relationships with development partners, along with the extreme climate vulnerabilities we face.

The FijiFirst Government has always invested in our people by caring for those who are vulnerable, building resilience to worsening climate impacts, empowering the disadvantaged to lift themselves from poverty and giving all our people a fair shot at success in our economy.

There are tremendous efforts being made by the FijiFirst Government in looking after our education, teachers and civil service sectors and the protection of our marine resources. We would like to have our oceans free from illegal mining, overfishing, and industrial dumping and, of course, plastic pollution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, speaking of economic realities, I believe that Government through its incentives on tax, more investors will be encouraged to invest creating more job opportunities.

The 2020-2021 Budget is a Budget built for every Fijian family everywhere in Fiji because all Fijian families matter. When Fijian families are strong, united, stable and thriving, the nation is strong, the nation is united, the nation succeeds. This is a Budget that:

- is grounded in the same values that build strong and stable Fijian families, responsibility, integrity, accountability, foresight and the sense of duty and care for all our fellow Fijians;
- empowers Fijian families, laying out new and better economic opportunities for every member of every family in the country.
- gives a leg-up to families, who need special care, those in rural and remote parts of Fiji and those low-income families;
- protects families who are facing tragic and unforeseen circumstances during this COVID-19 crisis;
- will bring every Fijian family more corresponding, not only here and now but for the years ahead.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, as a Member of this august Parliament, I appeal to all Honourable Members to join hands together by disseminating this Budget message honestly and truthfully to all the people, if we are genuine in taking our nation forward. Gone are the days when we lie to people about the truth, and let us work responsibly as Members of Parliament for the betterment of our people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Matthew 7 says as follows, and I quote:

“Everyone who hears this word of mine and puts them into practice is like the wise person, who build their house on the rock. The rain came down, the stream rose and the winds blew, and beat against their house, yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock.”

Honourable Members on the other side, listen to us on this side, please. Let us listen, let us practice and let us build. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully support this Budget and may the good Lord bless us and bless our beloved nation. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Sharma for his contribution to the debate.

Honourable Members, we will now suspend proceedings for dinner and Parliament will resume in an hour's time.

The Parliament adjourned at 5.52 p.m.



The Parliament resumed at 6.51 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now continue with the debate on the 2020-2021 Budget and I give the floor to the Honourable Pio Tikoduadua. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on 17th June, 2019, while responding to the 2019-2020 Budget in Parliament, I showed two pictures about the pathetic state of the facilities at the CWM Hospital and one was about a washroom door using intravenous tube as a makeshift lock, failing to provide privacy to patients using the washroom. Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was at CWM Hospital and I was aghast that despite the Honourable Minister for Health's assurance that the door was going to be fixed, it remained the same for 26 months.

I had said that, that picture showed the portrait of the nation, a nation at the odds with itself, torn apart by bad governance, lack of transparency, accountability and good governance. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have with me the two pictures of the same ward that I took yesterday at the CWM Hospital.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- You are not supposed to take pictures...

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- I just want to show it, so you know.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Listen, listen, Minister!

Now, let me explain again because it is not quite clear. This picture that I am holding, Mr. Speaker, Sir, shows the door to the same laboratory, the door minus the intravenous tube where it was before, and it is actually stopped and blocked by a piece of wood. There is a block that is stopping the door from closing.

When I went there yesterday, there was a person from the Acute Surgical Ward, who after the operation, was using the same room. I was just walking and I saw him with absolutely no privacy. Mr. Speaker, Sir, if there was a careFiji App, it is a shame on the Honourable Minister.

For 26 months I have been raising this issue here, and if there is anyone else who says that our health system is in order, I will say, no. I just want to say that and this picture, like the ones that I have showed earlier, Mr. Speaker, tells the painful story of the state of decay of the health facilities and, indeed, a nation presided over by the Honourable Prime Minister for over 13 years, who, for all intents and purposes, trusts only his Attorney-General and Minister for Economy or his right-hand man for guiding the nation, and the Honourable Minister for Economy has not betrayed his trust, at least, to his boss, who firmly believes he can do no wrong.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, come the time to deliver the 2020-2021 National Budget, the Honourable Minister for Economy has progressed from Cindy Lauper's *Time after Time* to Fleetwood Mac's *Sweet Little Lies*. During the Budget night on 17th July, 2020, for the umpteenth time, the Honourable Prime Minister endorsed every little lie that his right-hand man was telling the nation, to justify the biggest ever borrowing and worst economic performance in our 50th year of Independence. That is, indeed, transparency FijiFirst style, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our way or the highway.

I will outline some of those lies, as well as those uttered yesterday. Lie No. 1, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there was no reference whatsoever to the fact that the economy contracted in 2019 straight after the General Elections.

Lie No. 2, \$60 million allocation for the first 150,000 visitors to Fiji at \$400 each incentive when our borders will remain closed for all intents and purposes and there will be no travel or start of any Bubble any time soon. The sum is under Requisition (R) too, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The question is; is it to aid Fiji Airways? Why not incentivise local tourism using these funds to generate some activities in our hotels and resorts when it is not known as to when the borders to our biggest markets will be opened?

What happens to the few millions of dollars collected in Airport Departure Taxes of \$200 per ticket pre-sold by Fiji Airways to locals, travel agents and overseas to raise money because no travel has been undertaken and Departure Taxes will be reduced by \$100? Will those who have bought the pre-sale tickets be refunded \$100 for each ticket? It would be a daylight robbery if there is not any refund because there has been no travel, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Then there is no mention if Fiji Airways will refund all money for tickets bought by people and corporate clients who are now either unemployed or have closed their businesses, and have not been able to travel because of closed borders. However, we are told that Fiji Airways is now backtracking and refusing refunds, saying they will only do that in the case of tickets sold to destinations in the United States of America. This is contrary to what the Honourable Minister for Economy said when tabling a Motion to guarantee \$455 million for Fiji Airways on 25th May, 2020 when he said, and I quote from page 831 of the *Daily Hansard*:

“...in addition to the fixed costs, ongoing flights suspensions and cancellations are contributing towards increased customer refunds even if tickets have been resold as non-refundable, Fiji Airways is obliged to refund customers as the service is not being delivered at all.”

These are remedial measures that we needed to hear from the Honourable Minister. Why, Mr. Speaker, is Government and Fiji Airways conspiring to keep the funds to help boost their ailing finances?

Lie No. 3, Mr. Speaker, there is no explanation for the allocation of \$100 million Unemployment Benefit Fund in Head 50, apart from the Honourable Minister's announcement of Phase 3 to top up those withdrawing their own funds during Phase 3 of withdrawals. What about those in the informal sector who are not FNPF members?

Mr. Speaker, Lie No. 4, the increase to Fiji Police Force budget when \$40 million has been allocated to the so-called shovel-ready projects of new police stations in Nadi, Nakasi, Lautoka and Nalawa that were already under construction. And this allocation is also under Requisition, so there is no hope on generating any additional employment there.

Mr. Speaker, Lie No. 5, continuing construction of the Prime Minister's Office worth \$7 million when no construction has been done whatsoever, despite allocations in previous Budgets. Before this allocation, a total of \$13.35 million was allocated, also under Requisition in the last three Budgets. With this additional allocation, it will take it to the sum of \$20.35 million. Mr. Speaker, another act of transparency FijiFirst style when the ordinary workers of Fiji are impoverished and hungry. But the Prime Minister's Office is more important than the lives of our struggling citizens.

Mr. Speaker, Lie No. 6, reduction of guaranteed prices of a tonne of sugarcane to \$70 from \$85 with the Permanent Secretary for Sugar in the Prime Minister's Office complicating things and confusing growers by saying things that are contrary to what is clearly written in the Budget documents.

Now, the Honourable Prime Minister has followed suit saying that \$70 will guarantee the first three payments, with Government paying the full price of \$85 in the last payment which is due in October for the current season. What about the fourth payment, Mr. Speaker, that is due in May 2021? Yet, another example of bungling and wandering like punch drunks on the part of this Government that has been rightfully described as rudderless.

Mr. Speaker, Lie No. 7, yesterday, the Honourable Prime Minister attacked the *Fiji Times* and the Honourable Leader of the National Federation Party (NFP) for highlighting the \$100 million a month needed to service debt commitments of \$1.179 billion in the 2020-21 financial year as contained in the Budget Estimates. He said that both the *Fiji Times* and the Honourable Leader of the NFP forget that most debt was accumulated before 2007, which means until December 2006 when the Bainimarama-led regime came into power. Nothing can be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker.

Until the end of 2006, Government debt according to official Government figures was \$2.863 billion. The Budget Supplement document for this Budget shows that at the end of July 2020 (which is only three days away), debt will be \$6.705 billion, almost \$4 billion more accumulated in over 13 years, in contrast to \$2.863 billion in 36 years for the previous Government.

According to the Budget documents, debt level is projected to be \$8.256 billion which is also \$5.393 billion accumulated in 14 years than the \$2.863 billion accumulated in 36 years from 1970-2006, Mr. Speaker. And the Budget documents forecast national debt to be \$9.155 billion which the FijiFirst Government will bequeath to the people of Fiji when they are crushed at the polls, sometime between May 2022 and January 2023.

A debt of \$6.292 billion accumulated in 16 years in contrast to \$2.863 billion accumulated in 36 years. I would like to ask the Honourable Prime Minister to get real, do your sums right and stop relying on factually incorrect speeches concocted by your spin doctors. Mr Speaker, how have we come to the sweet little lies year in year out, culminating in the point of no return that we are facing? The answer lies in practice of deception and connivance in manipulating past Budgets.

A lot of my colleagues from the Opposition have said that this Budget figures are cooked. The Honourable Leader of the NFP stated that the Government has been manipulating Budget figures all along. I totally agree with them. I know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the rot in terms of manipulating GDP started in 2013 so that the Bainimarama-led Government could enter the 2014 General Elections in a strong position.

Mr. Speaker, I have in my possession an email given to me by the Honourable Prime Minister that was sent to him by the Honourable Attorney-General on 15th December, 2013. The Honourable Prime Minister, who was also the Minister for Finance from mid-August 2008 to September 2014, asked me to arrange a meeting with the Honourable Attorney-General as per the email and duly wrote his instruction on that email. As you all know, I was the Permanent Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office at that time.

I will not read the entire email, Mr. Speaker, that contained the Honourable Attorney-General's concerns about the need to increase the GDP base after the figures released by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics estimated the 2012 growth to be 1.7 percent when, according to Honourable Attorney-General, a growth of 2.2 percent was announced in the Budget.

I will read the concluding paragraphs that clearly prove that the Honourable Attorney-General's obsession with electioneering and not reality, and I quote:

“It is very disconcerting that the PS (Permanent Secretary) for Finance and PS Planning recommended the release of these figures. They should have known that this will directly contradict the announcements made by the Bainimarama Government and in particular by you in your annual budget address.”

The Honourable Attorney-General continued, and I quote:

“As Elections will be held in less than nine months, politicians will highlight that:

1. The economy is not doing well based on Government’s own numbers released by the FBOS (Bureau of Statistics);
2. Government debt is much higher in both absolute terms as well as ratio of GDP; and
3. Credibility of Government’s policies and the results would be attacked as the data for growth and debt show that things are worse off.

It is therefore important that FBOS recalls the GDP release under the 2008 base, as it contains major flaws or errors which will negatively impact this Government as we move towards elections.”

Now, let me repeat where the Honourable Attorney-General wanted the GDP to be increased:

“It is therefore important that FBOS recalls the GDP release under the 2008 base, as it contains major flaws or errors which will negatively impact this Government as we move towards elections.”

He concluded, and I quote:

“It is also recommended that we have a meeting with Ariff Ali from RBF (Reserve Bank of Fiji) to give you a full appraisal.”

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- What is wrong with that?

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, at that time, Mr. Ariff Ali was the Chief Manager, Economics Group at the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) who, in 2014, was appointed Deputy Governor and in 2017, appointed the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, nothing is more clear than the indisputable evidence that I have just outlined in Parliament today, of how the Honourable Attorney-General influenced the Honourable Prime Minister in agreeing to bend the reality and truth for political supremacy. That is what I call “weak, indecisive leadership” that readily condescends to his Attorney-General.

Instead of castigating his Attorney-General, the Honourable Prime Minister readily accepted his ploy to concoct economic data with the help of the then senior RBF officials so that both of who, under the FijiFirst Constitution, are the only two persons eligible to become party leader could disingenuously wing their way into power in September 2014.

Mr. Speaker, I am glad that I quit that Government after only nine months because my conscience could not allow me to serve two masters who were scratching each other’s backs while the nation and its people were being led up the garden path. For me, sacrificing my \$200,000 salary and pension was necessary to avoid becoming a “yes-man”, like all others currently in the FijiFirst Party, singing praises to the two-man rule, which is responsible ....

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Listen, Minister!

... for the destruction of this nation's social, economic and political fabric through politics of connivance, deviousness and deception.

All of them know it, Mr. Speaker, but they have no guts to stand and be counted for the fear of losing their seats and their hefty pay, perks and privileges. All of them are happy and content in going against their conscience to be subservient to members of the Animal Farm.

Deceptive indeed, Mr. Speaker! What Government can quite scandalously legalise COVID-19 as an act of God? Why? Because Government wants employers, including itself as the largest employer, to escape its obligation of paying fair redundancy and remuneration to its workers. One need not go any further than hundreds of Fiji Airways and Air Terminal Services workers, arbitrarily terminated without compensation, despite the workers agreeing to be on leave without pay.

This is from a Government that brags about leaving no one behind. Now it is leaving everyone breathing dust raised by its fast and furious galloping towards political annihilation. Their bogus budgeting has crashed our economy to its worst position in 50 years of our independent history, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, the crash started immediately after the November 2018 elections when instead of inspiring and generating confidence, Government went up to Level 9 hiding for 48 hours like rats, preventing the Opposition from serving legal documents. So, the strategies about low hanging fruits have plummeted our economy. This is clear as daylight.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear to me, the Honorable Prime Minister will not sack the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy because both are entwined in the game of political supremacy at the cost of Fiji and its people. For them, rule by freebies and fear mongering is normal, even if it destroys the nation. They do not care. One need not go any further than the Honourable Attorney-General's 2018 elections campaign threat delivered to voters at the Samabula Primary School on 21st October, 2018, when he said, "If you don't support a leader like Voreqe Bainimarama, you are putting a dagger to your neck."

Mr. Speaker, this Government has lost its moral authority to govern. They have led us to the edge of a cliff. The choice is clear. If we, the people of Fiji want to survive, we have to vote them down the cliff in the next elections because if we do not, they will push us for their own survival. The 2020-2021 Budget and the current severely depressed economy exacerbated by COVID-19 is a result of the two-man's insatiable appetite to be in power at all costs.

The last thing Fiji needs right now are leaders who believe in self-enrichment instead of genuinely enriching the lives of population in their hour of need. Mr. Speaker, enough is enough! Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Tikoduadua for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Assistant Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. J. SIGARARA.- Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of this august House; *bula re* and good evening. I am pleased to also make a contribution to the National Budget for the new financial year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend Government's confidence in preparing a bold, brave and sensible Budget, even while still coping with the impacts of COVID-19, together with the devastation of *TC Harold*.

It is clear we were faced with more than a crisis of health, far more, a crisis bigger than anything the world has seen in the last century. But given its nature and the unprecedented blows to our economy, we have shown through this Budget our ability to provide steadfast direction and sound leadership, guided by a beacon of hope.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government recognises that in the new normal, it requires a carefully thought-out budget that not only address the present but takes stock of the future. Government has carefully crafted the 2020-2021 Budget by prioritising sectors that need to grow to support economic recovery. It empowers Fijians to fight back and rebuild their lives. This is truly the Fijian spirit of never giving up in the face of adversity. I am confident that as a small island State, we have portrayed our footprints globally and displayed our unity and resilience as a nation, even during crisis and times of need.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management is grateful for its budget allocation of \$16.6 million. At this point, I acknowledge the support of merging the two institutions - Rural and Maritime Development and the National Disaster Management Office. This will obviously bring out efficiency through the streamlining of systems and processes in the coordination of emergency operations during natural disasters. This should set the platform for integrating disaster risk reduction in planning for development and disaster preparedness activities. The divisional coordination mechanism has gone through several natural events and was, again, a vital link in the national campaign to address COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reverse of rural to urban drift is possible when we are committed about raising standards of living in the rural areas. Even in times of crisis like that we are experiencing with COVID-19, we are seeing that this is possible.

We are seeing the resilience of the rural economy and its lure for people affected by the economic downturn. We have seen in the media and physically seen while visiting our community, men and women who have suffered job losses have returned to their village or farms to live off their land and also contribute positively to the progress of Fiji's rural economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, given the vast and rich resources in the rural areas, Government can rely on these rural-based sectors as the new drivers of growth to support the tourism industry. This can lead to reverse migration, once the necessary ground work is put into place.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Budget is not only about the business community or the rich, not at all. It is all for Fijians, focusing on the unfortunate and the needy in our rural communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government has demonstrated its commitment in the prioritisation of rural development in the budget for the coming financial year. This will ensure Fijians living in rural areas have the same level of access to essential services and economic opportunities as anywhere else in the country.

In addition to the budget allocated to the Ministry, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government has allocated funds in other Ministries in developing the rural and maritime regions. To name a few, a sum of \$59.4 million is allocated for Rural Roads, \$6.4 million for Rural Water Supply Programme, \$9.4 million for Rural Electrification, \$2 million for Re-Afforestation, \$1 million for Maritime Pine

Development, \$530,000 for Rural Banking Services, \$0.8 million for Drainage of Rural Residential Areas, and the list goes on.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are other programmes in the resource-based Ministries that can assist farmers to graduate from subsistence to semi-commercial and commercial production. There are programmes in the Ministry of Commerce, Tourism, Trade and Transport to assist in human capital development which is crucial for growth and sustainability, economic empowerment and project implementation by our rural and maritime citizens.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to work smarter with the allocation given and do more with less. We need to prioritise commitments and put in place concrete actions and accessible projects for immediate interventions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government is aware of the fact that our rural areas are resource-rich but majority are cash poor. We have to appreciate the potential wealth and economic gains that we can derive from the proper management of our natural resources.

All efforts, therefore, must now be made to unlock this potential, to convert resources, like land into cash and to generate rural life while at the same time, address food security and reduce our import bills while boosting our exports and ultimately improve the living standard and the quality of life of citizens in our rural communities.

The Ministry will continue to utilise the funds allocated to Self-Help Programmes and Community Access Roads, Footpaths and Footbridges, to implement projects targeted at these objectives and goals. I would like to also mention that we will work towards ensuring that disaster risk reduction and sustainability are factors to be considered while identifying projects.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the \$1 million allocation in the new budget for Self-Help Programmes, communities are encouraged to initiate their socio-economic sustainable development projects on a cost sharing basis to instil sense of ownership over these incentives. The arrangement has eased the burden, especially on those in the rural areas who come forward to access this programme in the last three years.

Government has invested about \$5 million for the 395 multi-sectoral projects. This speaks volume of Government's priority for rural development.

To assist with the living standard in our rural communities, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry will utilise funding received under its Community Access Roads, Footpaths and Footbridges (CARFF) Programme.

In the last three years, Government has invested about \$0.5 million for 145 community access projects throughout the country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government is setting aside another \$2 million to enable us to deliver more on rural infrastructure projects under the CARFF Programme. The programme has not only eased transportation access to those in remote rural communities, but has also made access to markets easier for farmers in rural Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it would be remiss of me not to highlight that in the 2019-2020 Budget financial year, the Ministry implemented 77 infrastructural projects under its CARFF Programme, benefiting more than 11,000 Fijians in remote rural communities.

To allow the Government to extend the reach of its services to the people, the Government has strategically placed stations to serve the 14 Provinces and districts throughout remote rural communities in Fiji, and also included is a station on the island of Rotuma.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, currently, Government is constructing three District Administrations Offices which should be completed and ready for commissioning in the first and second quarter of the next financial year. These are the Kavala Government Station in Kadavu, Wainikoro Government Station in Macuata and Namarai Government Station in Ra. This is testament of Government's intention of ensuring that Fijians in our rural communities are able to access our services at their doorstep. More than 30,000 Fijians from 63 villages and settlements from these three Provinces are expected to benefit from the implementation of these projects.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is, again, thankful that prayers of our officers working in the rural and maritime areas have been heard. This is an allocation of \$0.4 million in the Ministry's budget to commence with repairs and maintenance of residential quarters. Our Government has emphasised that it will not be leaving anyone behind. This is a testimony that the welfare of our officers are also being looked after. We strongly believe that this will lift the morale of our officers working in the Divisions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is already working towards the strengthening of the Integrated Rural Development Framework. In the recent months, there has been an increase in collaboration with key agencies to prepare the Ministry in improving its plan for rural development and implementation of programmes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in fact, the Ministry has bigger plans for the new financial year 2020-2021. The Ministry is developing a 10 year strategic plan, targeting effective coordination with all Government and non-government agencies in the hope of transforming the rural areas from their hardships to thriving resilient communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from my experience living in the village in the past years, I have noticed and observed the potential and opportunities available to our rural communities with the abundance of natural resources. We will do all that we can to ensure that the plights of our rural communities and the marginalised are addressed, as well as equality in the delivery of service to all citizens regardless of where they live, their gender, age and status in society.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry will work within its budget to improve the quality of people's lives and expand their ability to save their own future by exploring income-generating opportunities, along with amenities and services. Our Ministry's aspiration is to formulate a new strategic plan that will focus on the remodelling of the Ministry's programmes to address the development needs that I have already made reference to.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, partnership and cooperation with Government Ministries, non-government organisations, the private sector and development partners are going to be at the heart of radical transformation in the rural areas. These players are important as they all contribute to the supply chain process, from production to service delivery, using resources in the rural areas.

We plan to tap into resources made available by these partners to complement the Ministry's community capacity building programme funds to enhance human capital and facilitate stringent mindset and behaviour of recipients of Government assistance. Through such incentives, we will ensure that we inculcate a culture of resilience and sustainability in development.



Mr. Speaker, Sir, inclusive participatory approach in rural development is in line with the Government vision to build a better Fiji for all and leaving no one behind. We all know that the rural transformation will not happen overnight. An old famous saying by John Heywood, and I quote: “Rome was not build in a day, but they were laying brick every hour.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is determined to persevere and be an agent of change and agent of growth for all rural and maritime citizens in this new journey - post COVID-19.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to congratulate the Honourable Minister for Economy and his team for putting together this bold Budget and I wish to express my utmost support towards the 2020-2021 National Budget. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Assistant Minister for Rural and Maritime Development. I now give the floor to the Honourable Peceli Vosanibola. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. P.W. VOSANIBOLA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament; Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the motion before the House but first and foremost, I wish to thank the Honourable Minister for Economy for the Budget Address and the provision of relevant documents relating to the 2020-2021 Appropriation Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, beyond sickness and death, the COVID-19 pandemic brought economic damage and social disruption around the world. Dealing with the impact of the spread of COVID-19 is simply about protecting lives and reducing economic harm. Sir, on that note, I would like to congratulate and extend my sincere gratitude to all healthcare workers and members of the Disciplined Forces for their untiring efforts towards the containment of the Coronavirus.

Mr. Speaker, at the outset, a lot has been said about the 2020-2021 National Budget debate but as Members of Parliament, we must positively accept criticism and comments from any Member of the House and that is Parliamentary debate at its best.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a pivotal role of the Government is to implement activities and programmes in accordance with the National Development Plan and the annual approved budget whilst the Opposition, from time to time, keep track of the quality status of products derived from activities and programmes as implemented by the Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my observation on the Budget Address and the debate are as follows:

- (1) We were already in economic decline before the incident of COVID-19.
- (2) In the 10 years of unprecedented growth, the Government was not discipline in its spending so when this major global catastrophe occurred, we were exposed.
- (3) We are in the war of our lives, GDP contracted by 21 percent and that GDP is 83.4 percent.
- (4) We relied on tourism net recovery, expecting more than 400,000 tourists in 2021.

- (5) The customs and excise duty reductions are predicated on consumer led recovery and this is not the right policy setting. It aids the construction industry and more for the wealthy people but not for the ordinary citizens.
- (6) There is no significant assistance to the low income workers and FNPF continues to be the mainstay of the workers own savings which has been set aside for them when they stop earning and when it is needed the most.
- (7) No strategies for the diversification of the economy on manufacturing, agriculture and forestry, especially mahogany.
- (8) No incentives to attract large foreign economic sector businesses to invest in Fiji.
- (9) Cost savings in Government Payroll; a 20 percent reduction in the payroll would generate up to, at least, \$100 million savings which could be channelled for additional unemployment assistance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji has been in a weak economic and fiscal position since 2019 and the economic threat posed by the pandemic reveals the truth and further uncovers underlying weaknesses in our economy. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and *TC Harold*, the economy was already in recession and spiralling downwards. The initial growth forecast was estimated at around 3.4 percent, which was revised down to 2.7 percent and a further revision to 1 percent in December 2019.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the RBF Economic Review for the month of April shows an alarming situation of economic contraction well before the incident of COVID-19 pandemic which contracts to around 10 percent. And according to the latest International Monetary Fund projection, the economy is lightly to contract by 5.8 percent in 2020. Taking into account the impact of *TC Harold*, the economy will further contract to around 10 percent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the RBF Economic Review provides data on an annual basis to March 2020. Fiji's first confirmed case of Coronavirus was on 19th March this year, indicating that the worsening economic situation as shown in the April review was not due to the pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the face of adversity or crisis, facts and truths matter and we cannot do business as usual. There is a tendency of a blame-game situation - blaming our economic crisis on the pandemic as an act of God. As commented by Archbishop Peter Loy Chong, and I quote:

“The chaos and sufferings in the world are acts of human beings, not acts of God. Rather than blaming God, human beings should take the responsibility for the events of our history and make good moral visions. An economic crisis is not an act of God”.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the downward revision of revenue expenditure by \$1.729 million and \$1.714 million respectively in the 2019-2020 Budget which includes the revised budget is a proof of the precarious state of Government finances which, over the years, had been surviving on heavy borrowings. The rescue measures now put in place are coming at an enormous cost to the nation and most importantly, to the people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian people are questioning the rationale behind the blanket reduction of customs duties on a host of imported goods and luxury items, at a time the nation needs to tighten up, encourage local production and save foreign exchange.

The Honourable Minister for Economy is encouraging cheaper imports and putting local producers and manufacturers at a distinct disadvantage. That clearly shows that the Government has opted for a massive budget deficit of 37 percent of the GDP, which is totally unnecessary and quite irresponsible. This is not the time to be engaging substantially reducing our revenue base.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the ordinary people who are struggling to put basic food on the table for their families are unable to buy imported foods, items, air conditioners, washing machines and dryers, pearls and diamonds and other precious gems, not to mention, cars.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it would have been a lot more helpful if the Honourable Minister for Economy remove the 9 percent VAT on all staple food items. The Honourable Minister should have focussed on boosting agricultural production and home gardening, subsidy on fertilisers, natural organic compost and equipment, considering that it would have been a lot more helpful.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, some have labelled the 2020-2021 National Budget as bold, clever, irresponsible or even deceiving. Tourism will not grow until there is a vaccine for Coronavirus. Government cannot actually increase demand through lower prices. Demand will only increase when consumers have income and very importantly, when their confidence in the future is higher. We do not have these two ingredients now.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government will now borrow more to subsidise motor vehicles which will add to the road congestion. The low cost of alcohol so people can drink more, will enhance a rise in social problems. This Budget is for the rich, all tax break will favour the rich more.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, reducing taxes to drive consumer demand when there is a dwindling cash in our declining economy is illogical. Providing a digger and agricultural machines in every provincial district to drive and boost agriculture production is more practical and logic. *Yaqona* is a huge export potential, but there is a great need to build farm roads for its access and to increase production.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when the debt goes above 6 percent of the GDP, countries surely struggle to repay their debts. The truth of the matter is that, our Government continues to borrow excessively from \$2.5 billion in 2006 to \$8.3 billion in 2020.

Our future generation will be burdened to pay all these debts. Developments will be much slower and while other countries will be progressive, Fiji will be left behind paying debts.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, like all government's past Budgets, when the Government revenue is already shrinking by 70 percent, the Honourable Minister for Economy now decides to borrow and cut tax on luxury items. Lowering fringe benefit taxes and increasing other tax allowances will only benefit the rich.

This crisis is about money. In this Budget, only 5 percent of the taxpayer's money is allocated to the people who have lost incomes and the rest goes to businesses.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as Shadow Minister for Forests, the Ministry of Forest's budget for 2020-2021 is totalling \$15.7 million, comprising of \$10.1 million for Operating Expenditure and \$4.9 million for Capital Expenditure and VAT component of \$0.7 million. This represents an increase of 60 percent on the revised 2019-2020 financial year, where the allocation was \$14.9 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, out of the \$15.7 million of the allocated budget to the Ministry, \$10.7 million is within the Ministry's ambit of expenditure, while \$4.9 million, being under requisition within the Ministry of Economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also wish to commend the Honourable Minister for Forests for his budget response, especially to the activities and programmes implemented by the Ministry. Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I request the Honourable Minister for the timely submission of their annual report and it seems that on the economic sector, annual reports from Ministries are still lagging behind.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the forestry sector, we are steadfast in our quest in advocating the rights, interests and aspirations of the resource owners. There is a dire need to build up our economic sectors in empowering our economy to generate the revenue we need and the jobs that we want to create.

Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the RBF Economic Review for the month of June reported that sectoral performances to-date remain weak as electricity, cement, gold and timber production fallout in the month of May to a double digit decline of -23.9 percent pine wood supply, -50.8 percent on sawn timber and -11.5 percent on wood chips due to subdued demand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the budget for the Ministry should be increased to stimulate more activities, employment and importantly, its contribution to our economy and the areas I suggest which require an increase includes; forest subsidy on value-adding machines, upgrading of national tree seed centre, sandalwood programme, monitoring and surveillance of logging and the purchasing of harvesting machines.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a significant event which occurred during the pandemic is the reversal of the urban drift movement, whereby laid-off and terminated workers and families from tourism and airline industries and the private sectors have returned to their villages due to the hardship in life they are facing daily if they are to continue to live in the urban areas, especially on the island of Ovalau. Therefore, we wish to thank the Pacific Fishing Company for employing more than 200 laid-off and terminated workers from the tourism and airline industries.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another glaring example, as alluded to by the Honourable Minister for Forests, is Mr. Dralolo of Koromakawa Village in Labasa and I wish to quote his comments while participating in the Ridge to Reef Tree Planting Initiative, and I quote:

“I am very lucky to earn an income in planting trees to make ends meet before my farm produce would be ready for harvest.”

Therefore, we strongly recommend that `cash for work` concept be applied to the continuing implementation of the 30 million trees initiative by the Ministry of Forests which will provide financial assistance to our laid-off and terminated workers, as well as Fijians in the rural areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also commend the Government for the opening of the new markets in Laqere and Rakiraki but nevertheless, the people and the existing market vendors of Ovalau and Moturiki are patiently waiting for the construction of the new Levuka Market.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, upon anticipating the next wave of COVID-19, it requires manpower. Therefore, we need to recruit our graduates, unemployed public health officers into the Civil Service.

The Government has its unprecedented level of boastfulness in advocating positive economic growth, its programmes, including the National Budgets for the last 10 years. May I remind the other side of the House on a biblical verse from Jeremiah 9: 23-24, and I quote:

“The Lord says: Don’t boast about your wisdom or strength or wealth. If you feel you must boast then have enough sense to boast about worshipping me, the Lord. What I like best is showing kindness, justice and mercy to everyone on earth.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we are nearing to the dawn of the new financial year, the Honourable Members of the Opposition request the Government to relook at its boastful attitude and govern the people of Fiji with kindness, justice and mercy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not support the 2020-2021 Appropriation Bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Peceli Vosanibola for his contribution to the debate.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament and the people of Fiji; I fully and undeservedly support the 2020-2021 Budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are not usual times, every country in the world faces severe economic stress. The world has not seen economic stress of this kind for a hundred years and this may be far more severe than the great depression of the late 1920s.

This is a problem that is not of our own doing but the consequence of COVID-19. We can choose the path of austerity, as seems to be espoused by Honourable Members of the Opposition, or the path of timidity, or we can be bold. The global financial crisis of 2008 has shown that austerity does not work.

The experiences of the great depression and the aftermath of World War II, shows that in times such as this, the answer is to do what our normal instincts tell us not to do. Such a time as this is not a time to shut back in fear but it is the time that requires bold, visionary leadership. It is not a time to wallow in self-pity nor a time to twiddle fingers, it is a time for clear analysis, a time for boldness and a time to take action. It is a time to go on the offensive. This is precisely what this Budget is doing - audacity, boldness, that is what this Budget is about.

Thankfully, we have FijiFirst in control, thankfully, we have the Honourable Prime Minister in control and thankfully, we have the Honourable Minister for Economy leading the way! Our strategy is clear and emphatic, we are putting in place the measures that will enable our tourism sector to compete once our borders open up.

In the meantime, we are looking to generate jobs in this country and the best way to generate jobs quickly is construction. That has been proven over and over again, every time we have economic problems in the world over. Construction is the way to do it and that is what this Budget is focusing on. Construction generates jobs, growth consumption and stimulates our economy.

In this process, we are continuing our emphasis on agriculture, commerce and our micro and small medium enterprises. At the same time, the developments we have brought into place these past few years to benefit the most marginalised in society - the social welfare, education and all those assistance are not being taken away. Those are being maintained and even expanded, especially in terms of unemployment benefits. As we get the jobs back, we get growth with which comes the

raising of revenue that will in turn be used to benefit all the people of this country, and that is the strategy of this Government.

My two Ministries are geared up to do their bit to economic recovery for this country. The Ministry of Lands and Minerals Resources budget has been given a budget of \$24.9 million. We will use this to strike the right balance between economic and environmental sustainability and also to drive climate change and disaster mitigation and adaptation initiatives.

The Ministry will look to generate public private partnerships to help us grow the kind of infrastructure expansion that is needed to stimulate our economy. We will privatise the identification of land for improvement in infrastructure, construction of hospitals and health centres, medical centres, police posts and also for housing where this is needed. We will focus on the twin targets of maintaining as much good agricultural land as possible for food security and agro industries and at the same time, assist the growth of small and medium enterprises.

The processing of expired leases to ensure security of tenureship will be prioritised and we will work to ensure that all State agricultural land is provided to those who will plant on it. In consultation with other line agencies, we will identify portions of agricultural land that are not amenable to agriculture or which are located in areas that make them highly amenable to business activities and rezone them as such.

We will use our existing networks and strengthen collaboration with other Government Ministries, like the Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Town and Country Planning, Ministry of Waterways and other relevant agencies in pursuit of our goals.

Access to land and speed of access to land is critical and so the Ministry is now revising all of its core pareto processes. We intend to reduce processing timelines and to get rid of wastage with a focus on working smarter rather than just working harder.

As part of this drive to efficiency, we are also looking to improve our legislations such as the Mining Act and our Surveying Regulations. Monitoring will also be strengthened and priority given to the allocation or identification of State land for investment.

In order to adapt and recover in the event of earthquake and tsunami events, our Department of Mineral Resources will be investing in improving our capacity to understand seismic risks and in this way, reduce risk to our population and reduce the possibility of endangering lives. We have always relied on the Tsunami Warning Centre based in Hawaii, but have now set aside funds to enhance our seismic equipment, and thus improve our ability to forewarn our people.

We are continuing to work on making it easier to access land information through the Vanua GIS so that people are able to view online and analyse data they need without having to physically visit Government Ministries to get land information. During this COVID-19 episode, our staff from the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources have been seconded to the Ministry of Health to provide advice in using their geospatial expertise to help out on contact tracing, fever clinics, et cetera. They also created a Vanua GIS COVID-19 App that contributed to Fiji's effective and quick response to COVID-19.

The Ministry will continue its programme on assisting communities with groundwater development activities and the identification of potential boreholes. The drilling and reticulation activities will continue under this Budget.

Through our foreshore development activities, we will continue to monitor the rehabilitation of mangrove and ensure that mangroves lost are replanted and replaced, and also identify and make proposals to potential REDD+ initiatives for the 28 designated lands under the Land Bank Programme. In this way, conservation of our forests and enhancement of our forest carbon stock is sustained.

Work continues on the completion of the Geodetic Datum structure, the Vanua GIS, the identification and acquisition of viable land for commercial purposes, transmission stations, satellite market sites for the Ministry of Local Government, land subdivision and the maintenance of State land.

The Ministry of Infrastructure and Meteorological Services has a budget of \$30.6 million which will be used for policy formulation, planning, design regulatory activities, coordination and implementation of the programmes, projects and services relating to engineering works, meteorology and public activities which are part of our Government infrastructure in Fiji.

We will continue to strengthen our policy capabilities through the review of policies, such as the National Energy Policy, the Fiji Electrification Policy, Bio Fuel Policy, National Water and Sanitation Policy and the Rural Water and Sanitation Policy, to name a few.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$600,000 is being committed to carry out maintenance and upgrading of Government-owned buildings. Upgrading of the existing water and sewer lines to public buildings, such as Government offices and quarters will continue to ensure safe, friendly and conducive living environment that is OHS compliant.

Over the last eight years, Government has invested an amount of \$20.3 million to ensure safe and healthy living facilities to tenants of public buildings.

My Ministry is also investing in the upgrade of building software that is necessary for efficient turnaround time to improve the quality and time taken to deliver, design and costing works.

Providing affordable and sustainable electricity services remains a priority. The amount of \$7.8 million is provided to the Department of Energy for house wiring of grid extension projects and this will be used to connect an additional 6,674 houses to the grid, which will benefit a total of 26,696 ordinary Fijians. To date, more than 79 percent of Fiji's households are now connected to the grid.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$1.4 million will be used to rehabilitate diesel schemes and solar home systems that were affected during *TC Winston* and *TC Keni*. This allocation will have a sure and direct impact on rural people's health and well-being, security and improved resilience. We intend to continue reducing the number of people who rely on fossil fuel-based power, therefore, contribute to reducing the amount of fuel imported into Fiji.

More than half a million dollars has been allocated to our Department of Water and Sewerage to deliver its role of regulating the water in sewerage sector, formulating national water and sanitation policies and to monitor all water and sanitation systems, including water in effluent quality in both, urban areas operated by the Water Authority of Fiji and also in the rural areas.

The Ministry will continue to carry out this water quality testing for rural water schemes for the 130 EPS systems, the WAF water treatment plants and the WAF wastewater treatment plants. All of these are in line with our National Development Plans (NDPs) and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 6.

Our Meteorological Services has been allocated a total of \$5.91 million to provide timely and quality weather, climate and hydrological information to the general public. A component of this funding is dedicated for the upgrading of the Viwa and Udu Point outer island stations to improve the living and working conditions of our staff in the islands and to protect the delicate and expensive instrument equipment of the existing network.

The Fiji Meteorological has been innovative in its service and we will continue to develop and improve its services with the funding that it has been provided with. The Ministry is focused on being cost effective and on keeping in close contact with those that we serve. Increasingly, now staff are using virtual technology to run the Ministry, especially for discussions with our teams in the North and the West. We are exploring opportunities of partnering with communities to foster collaborative relationships of service delivery to the local communities.

Government has allocated \$195.4 million to Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) to help us achieve our goal of 24/7 delivery of water to all Fijians and expand Fiji sewerage network. WAF now provides quality drinking water and wastewater services to over 152,261 residential and non-residential metered customers residing largely in urban areas. It is also setting up water supply system in rural schemes and is now has a reach of over 829,000 people nationwide, \$24.5 million is being allocated for water treatment quality and WAF is now supplying more than 124,000 megalitres of treated water annually to homes and businesses, and treats 21,666 megalitres of waste water.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$7.3 million has been allocated for wastewater treatment plants. Fijians will greatly benefit from this, as we expect to see an increase in water supply capacity by 26 percent and wastewater treatment capacity by 164 percent.

The much-needed Rewa Water Supply Project is ongoing and will significantly enhance the water supply to the densely populated and fast-growing Suva-Nausori region. To ensure continuous water supply, WAF has embarked on undertaking capital programmes to improve both, the safety and efficiency of water intake structures.

Fijians in rural areas are not being left behind, \$6.4 million has been set aside for the Rural Water Supply Programme and \$3.5 million is provided for rural water carting to communities in non-metered areas during the periods of drought, water disruption and during the current recovery period from COVID-19. Given the current pandemic, for those who genuinely cannot afford to pay their water bills, we have extended our initiative, allowing Fijians to defer payments of water bills to 31st March, 2021.

An efficient and well-maintained road network is essential for the economic wellbeing of any country. The \$348.9 million provided to the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) through the budget will allow the Authority to continue its progress on upgrading roads, bridges and jetties. Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$70 million is being dedicated for routine maintenance of the network, a further \$30 million will be used to carry out more of the long-term road rehabilitation works that we have recently seen throughout Suva. The future focus of this work will also be Nadi Town, Labasa Town and other critical roads in Suva. Other urban centres around Fiji will also benefit.

Over the next 12 months, the FRA Critical Bridges Programme will complete the replacement of 20 severely deteriorated bridges around Fiji. Also, through this budgetary allocation, FRA will complete the installation of 10 modular bridges acquired recently in the USA and recently delivered to Fiji. This will be funded by a budget of \$51.2 million allocated for this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$20 million is being used for capital improvement allocation for the rehabilitation to Queen Elizabeth Drive from Ratu Sukuna Road to Laucala Bay Road and this will



also align and replace the Nasese Bridge. The FRA also recognises the importance of accessibility for rural communities and \$59.4 million has been set aside for this.

For urban communities, FRA will improve the quality of access and pedestrian safety by completing more sections of more new footpaths and street lighting, a budget of \$14.7 million has been set for this community programme.

Over the next 12 months, through its collaboration with the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank, FRA will commence the major highway renewal projects along Queens Road, Kings Road and the Nabouwalu to Labasa Road. They will also commence the complete renewal of the 11 roads in Suva, including the replacement of utilities and the introduction of road safety measures to ensure that road users and pedestrians can be safe at all times. This work will be funded through the \$87.5 billion allocation in this Budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to take a bit of time just to address some of the issues that have been raised in this House. The Honourable Ratu Matanitobua (who is not here), in his speech, has been a bit thick and has forgotten what has happened here in Fiji in our recent past and why it has happened. This talk of unfinished business is null and void. Stay away from this kind of sentiments because it will bring about nothing but chaos and discrimination and the continuation of racial discrimination in this wonderful and peaceful land of ours! Fiji does not need those sorts of sentiments.

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Kuridrani, the Honourable Qionibaravi and may be a few others, have deliberately misled this House and the people of Fiji on the average growth rate of our GDP over these past 10 years. The RBF statistics that I have here clearly show what the statistics are in terms of the average growth rate. From the year 2010 to 2019, it is 3.2 percent. They choose to start the decade from the year 2011. A decade starts from 2010 and 2020 is an anomalous year, it is not a normal year.

The downturn that we have this year is not because of anything this Government did or did not do, it happens because of the pandemic that is affecting the globe. So, you cannot take the downturn this year to be a reflection of the past 10 years, it is an anomalous year. So, you need to look at the growth rate from 2010 to 2019. So, to stand in this House and try to make these aspersions that the growth rate is 0.75 percent is mischievous and misleading. This is an Honourable House, we need to be honourable, we need to speak with honour and speak the truth at all times. That is something that we must always do.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- It applies both sides.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, when the Honourable Tikoduadua resigned in 2014, he made a public statement that it was due to ailing health conditions, nothing to do with the leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister or the Honourable Attorney-General. Therefore, he either lied at that time or he is lying now. He lied to all Fijians as to the reason behind his resignation.

His maiden speech in Parliament should be played back so that he can get it. In his maiden speech in Parliament, he kept praising the Honourable Prime Minister. Now, out of bitterness, he is attacking the Honourable Prime Minister. He has made outrageous claims and GDP.

I have read the email that he is talking about, he is interpreting these things to suit his own agenda. But if you read that email, there are concerns from the IMF consultant about the way those

GDP figures are put together and he had talked about the need to review the statistics. There is nothing sinister in that. He chooses to interpret this for the manner that suits his own agenda.

The last thing that we need to know is that, when the GDP figures are put together, they are not put together by anyone person but is put together by a Committee of experts and professionals. The Macro-economic Committee puts this together. It is not the Governor of the RBF on his own or the Bureau of Statistics or the Honourable Minister for Economy or a separate party that puts this together, but to try to come to this House and say anything else, I think is devious, despicable, to be able to say the very least. We need to make sure that we talk about things that are true.

Now, the Honourable Saukuru said in this House that the price of sugar during the SDL time was the highest ever. Honourable Saukuru, the highest paid during the SDL time for sugar was \$60.80 per tonne. The highest paid during the reign of the FijiFirst Party is \$88.49. If you do not understand, \$88 is bigger than \$60. It is bigger, \$60 is less than \$88, and that needs to be known.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, throughout this Budget Debate, the Opposition has labelled this as a Doom's Day Budget. Nothing can be further from the truth. This rhetoric reminds me of snivelling, fear-ridden children in the midst of a calamity. Yes, we are in tumultuous times but it is not only Fiji, the whole world is in the midst of this great global calamity.

I have heard this doom's day predictions, I have heard the various *Bible* verses, espousing tragedy and doom. Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, a pair of brothers also wrote a Book each in the *Bible*. The younger brother, Jude, reminded his readers that there are people in this world who are, and I quote:

“... wild waves of the sea, churning up the foam of their shameful deeds. They are like wandering stars, doomed forever to the blackest darkness.”

A lot of the rhetoric from the other side is precisely that - doom forever to the blackest darkness. On this side, we do not think like this. We take on board the admonition of his elder brother, James, who had this to say, and I quote:

“When trouble comes your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy, for you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow.”

That is our mindset, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We have faith.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The Prime Minister cannot shout and say, “shut up.”

HON. MEMBER.- What's your point of order?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- He was saying to me, “shut up”. Do not use the words, “shut up”. And I think the Honourable Minister is also misleading. He is talking about the GDP growth rate, that the Honourable Leader of the Opposition is misleading Parliament. He quoted 2011 to 2020 average growth, not 2010 to 2019, so you correct that. Read the *Daily Hansard*!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Read the *Daily Hansard*!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You are not the Speaker, Prime Minister. I listen to the Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, take your seat! Take your seat!

You have got to be able to take it here on the chin and give it, that is what you have to be able to do here. Some of you do it, some of you take it and some of you do not, which is simple as that. But the thing is....

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- He said 2011 to 2020.

HON. SPEAKER.- I will let you finish, Honourable Minister.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, because I have lost my train of thought, I will go back to what I have just read.

We take on board the admonition of his elder brother, James, who had this to say, and I quote:

“When trouble comes your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy, for you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow.”

That is our mindset.

We have faith in God and believe in our vision and our calling to lead this country in this time. We choose not to twiddle our thumbs and bite our fingernails and rant and rage, and continue to do what we have done in the past.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J. USAMATE.- No! This is not the time for austerity, as was proven in the global financial crisis of 2008. We choose to see this as an opportunity. We choose to count these difficulties as a challenge. We choose audacity, we choose to do what is necessary to bring this country out of these trouble times.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 1941, as Great Britain was under the intense pressure of World War II and when she stood on the verge of defeat, the great Winston Churchill made a speech to the boys at Harrow School, and this is what he told them, I quote:

“This is the lesson: never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never-in nothing, great or small, large or petty – never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense.”

The Honourable Prime Minister will never give in. This FijiFirst Government will never ever give up for you, the people of Fiji - never, never, never, ever will we give up on you. We have the audacity to put in place the best way forward out of this, and this is what this Budget is all about.

It is my honour and privilege to support the 2020-2021 Budget before the House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his contribution to the debate.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to respond to the 2020-2021 Budget. Let me in closing, as the last Opposition speaker, reiterate the key issues yesterday from the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and I repeat, that this Budget is one of self-destruction, irresponsible, rudderless and a budget to nowhere; an Alice in Wonderland budget.

Let me refer to the issues raised by the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment. He does not seem to acknowledge what Honourable Kuridrani had stated regarding the yield per hectare where breakeven without assistance is 90 tonnes per hectare, under previous governments, and even with all the assistance under FijiFirst Party, they are still not achieving that. One of the releases from the Prime Minister's Office clearly stated the assistance provided - cane planting grant, cane access road, cane cartage from 2016 to 2020 is totalling a sum of \$299 million.

If you look at the appendices to the Budget Supplement, sugar as per GDP by sector has been declining from 2016 to 2020. Sugar's contribution to GDP is \$151 million, according to these figures and for the same period, according to the Ministry of Sugar, \$299 million has been injected. So, I ask the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment not to mislead the House regarding his contention that sugar has been improving as per the amount spent.

The statistics are stark and the people must realise the following:

- budget deficit - \$2.1 billion;
- Government revenue has fallen to FJ\$1.674 billion, a reduction of 38 percent in the 2020 revenue;
- Government debt is at a staggering - \$8.25 billion;
- economic contraction - 21.7 percent;
- net deficit as a percentage of GDP - 20.2 percent;
- inflation rate - 1 percent;
- debt to GDP - 83.4 percent;
- debt to GDP, including contingencies - 91.3 percent; and
- debt repayments as in the Budget documents - \$749 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me remind the House that the average actual expenditure for the last seven years is around \$2.9 billion and revenue around \$2.6 billion, compared to the 2020-2021 Budget. Revenue will drastically be reduced to \$1.674 billion which is understandable and expected. However, the expenditure has increased from an average of \$2.9 billion to \$3.7 billion, an increase of \$800 million. This definitely does not make sense as the variation of revenue and expenditure is huge.

To use the misused phrase, the fact of the matter is that revenue streams have not been realised and secondly, there is always substantial under expenditure. The expenditure in the Budget is 220 percent the size of projected revenues. The deficit of the Budget is 120 percent of the revenue and

deficit as a percentage of GDP is 20.2 percent. This is totally irrational and a threat to the security and wellbeing of the nation.

The Honourable Minister for Economy has been continuously touting 12 years of consecutive growth, however, what he failed to tell the House and the people of this country was that, the economy was being grossly mismanaged. The FijiFirst Government:

- relied too much on tourism;
- over-taxed tourism;
- ignored other sectors of potential export growth, especially the primary industries;
- failed to fix sugar, as I had mentioned;
- wasted a lot of money on unnecessary spending; and
- continued to borrow irresponsibly to Fiji's malpractice.

Additionally, they built a consumption-based economy so that when COVID-19 hit, we were devastatingly exposed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the challenges we face can be laid squarely at the feet of the FijiFirst Government. It is also no secret, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that since 2018, the economy has been in decline, yet the Government continued to lack discipline and continued to spend recklessly.

On 13th March, 2020, a report by *Fijivillage* stated the Honourable Minister for Economy as saying, and I quote: "The economy remains under prudent and responsible management." Now, remember he said this in March 2020, two-and-a-half months into the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now, prudent and responsible management also requires you to not only control and reduce costs through greater efficiency but to continually look at ways to reduce costs and curtail wasteful spending. This is what prudent and responsible management requires, which is why I believe that this was a misleading statement by the Honourable Minister for Economy, which was intended to deflect the truth from the country's real financial woes.

In terms of cost of Government operations, the cost of Government operations for Qarase's six years was \$6.1 billion, compared to Honourable Bainimarama's first term cost of \$7.6 billion, which was \$1.5 billion more or a 25 percent increase. In Honourable Bainimarama's second year term in this Government, the cost of operations increased to \$12.3 billion which represents an increase of \$4.7 billion or 62 percent over his first term.

With regards to staffing, the Qarase cost of staffing was \$3 billion. In his first term, Honourable Bainimarama's staffing cost was \$3.4 billion, a 13 percent increase. In his second term, staffing cost rose to \$5.1 billion, a \$1.7 billion or 50 percent increase over the first term.

On capital expenditures, the total capital expenditure of the Qarase Government was \$1.3 billion. The capital expenditure for the Bainimarama-led Government in the first term was \$2.1 billion. Again, an increase of 61 percent over Qarase's Government. The capital expenditure in the second term for the Bainimarama-led Government was \$6.9 billion which is an increase of \$4.8 billion, a massive 229 percent increase over the first term.

We all know about wasteful spending. Over the period from 2007 to 2018, the Bainimarama-led Government approved what is considered to be wasteful spending, and some of these include (as already mentioned), the:

- International Golf Tournament - \$35.2 million, which is now defunct;

- Motor Vehicle Leasing from 2009 - \$188.6 million;
- Super 15s Rugby - \$28 million;
- PR Qorvis, et cetera, amounting to \$9 million;
- digital transformation - \$58 million;
- *Walesi* - \$29 million;
- One Hundred Sands; and
- FBC, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, had this Government acted more responsibly, they could have had potential savings of \$854 million.

Economic Performance; when you factor in the \$4.7 billion increase in operating cost, \$4.8 billion in capital expenditure and add the \$27.4 million in wasteful spending, you get an almost \$10 billion increase in wasteful spending and the cost of Government in just six years.

So, Mr. Speaker Sir, as this FijiFirst Government heads into 2019, it has created massive headwinds for itself and for the country. SMEs and businesses generally are already downsizing and in cost-cutting mode by 50 percent, plus in some cases before the Chinese Government even reported the existence of Coronavirus. The reality of the matter, Sir, is we were in trouble well before COVID-19 and the financial burden and pressure placed by this Government over the years has brought us to this point.

For the people of Fiji, as we have explained, the FijiFirst Government's behaviour over 14 years of this Government's existence, they have been spending irresponsibly and borrowing using overdrafts. Imagine, if you are a worker earning \$200 per week and because you could not manage your budget, you started borrowing from the bank on overdraft, for example, \$20 per week. So over time, your debt accumulated and all of a sudden, you do not have enough to feed your family and live comfortably. Before you pay for food, electricity, water, et cetera, you have to pay your bank first and you end up in trouble. This is where this FijiFirst Government has taken the people to.

Do not be deceived by the free bus fares, seawalls, nursing stations, roads and footpaths, you the people of Fiji have to pay this at some point before and for future generation. The Government is borrowing to pay its debt this year, in life, you cannot do that, and it is called `going broke

If you do not believe me, Mr. Speaker, Sir, or the other side, the rating agency, Moody, gives you some indication. Fiji was downgraded recently on 29th June, 2020 by Moody's from Ba3 stable to negative. Let me quote from Moody's Investor's Service article dated 29th June, 2020, and I quote:

“Moody's Investors Service has today affirmed that the Government of Fiji's local and foreign currency long-term issuer and senior unsecured debt ratings at Ba3 and changed the outlook to negative from stable.

The change in outlook to negative is driven by the risk that the government is not able to reverse a large increase in its debt burden and weakening debt affordability as a result of the significant shock to Fiji's tourism sector due to the coronavirus outbreak. In particular, in a downside scenario where a gradual recovery in international travel to Fiji does not materialise over the next few quarters, the government's credit profile would weaken and may be consistent with a lower rating.”

We are in trouble, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Where is the Bainimarama Boom? You only have to look at New Zealand and Australia on how they have managed their economies by living within their

means and created (as the experts say) fiscal space or ability to manage themselves in a COVID-19 crisis to clearly appreciate that the Bainimarama Boom was really a bust. The people deserve better.

There are some key assumptions in the Budget, we need to look at the details. The Budget assumes, and I refer you to Table 10 on page 116 of the Budget Supplement, that we will get 50 percent of the 2019 traffic numbers in terms of tourism - 447,195 passengers. This is incorrect and misplaced assumption.

It is most likely that the bulk, if not all our passengers in the next year will come from Australia and New Zealand. If you believe this, then the 2019 traffic numbers that the Honourable Minister of economy should have used, was for Australia and New Zealand and not the total number of visitors. So the base number should be 562,929, specifically referring to Australia and New Zealand visitor arrivals, not the total figure as stated in the table.

If we take 50 percent of that, we end up with a different figure. The number used by the Honourable Minister is wrong, and the wrong number would have made its way into the Budget projections. If we had used the Australia and New Zealand numbers, only 50 percent is 281,465, not 447,195 visitor arrivals as stated in the projections. Mr. Speaker, Sir, again this does not take into account the seasonality which sees more traffic travel from July to December, so this number might even be on the high side.

In a nutshell, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the visitor arrivals from which the budget has been based is wrong, it is overstated by 165,730 or 37 percent. The tragedy of this, is because they have used the wrong number, to begin with, for tourism arrivals and all the decisions emanating from this calculation might be wrong. This is just one wrong assumption. The question is; was it intentional deception? As we have heard from Honourable Tikoduadua, it could be deception and it could be intentional.

The Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport and Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services and Lands and Mineral Resources have referred to the GDP growth rate as mentioned by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition - 0.75 percent. This refers to the period 2011 to 2020, not the period you have stated - 2010 to 2019, which is 3.22 percent. So you are comparing different...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- ... 10 year periods. So he is referring to a particular period which you are not referring to.

The other important point we have to note here, when you go back, in terms of GDP growth, from 1971 to 2020, you mentioned 3.22 percent. Let me remind you that, that is not unprecedented. Their economic growth has been more than FijiFirst. For example, let me look at the five year periods of GDP average growth rate: 1971 to 1975 - 5.86 percent; 1986 to 1990 - 4.08 percent; and the highest during the FijiFirst rule was 3.82 percent. So there is nothing unprecedented about economic growth during your rule. Let us look at the facts and figures here.

I am not sure why you were referring to unprecedented economic growth in all your documents since 2006 in the last few years because to me, that is misleading. It is misleading the House and the people of Fiji.

When you look at the GDP growth rates from the Ratu Mara era, in 1973 - 12.7 percent; 1979 - 12 percent. Under the Honourable Rabuka, in 1989 - 12.9 percent; 1992 - 6.1 percent; and in 1999 - 8.7 percent during the Coalition Government. Under the Qarase Government, it was 5.4 percent in 2004. Under the FijiFirst Government, the highest was 5.6 percent, so please, do not mislead the House regarding the unprecedented economic growth. Let us stick to the facts as we go ahead.

On trade and investment, rather than playing with our tariff, we should pay more attention on facilitating trade, providing the enabling environment for investment. The expenditures in the Budget, even though is directed at SMEs to provide employment, are not clear.

The costly bureaucratic process in clearing goods need to be streamlined. We have spoken about the ease of doing business and, of course, this has worsened. I do understand that Government is trying to improve this with simplified business registration and facilitation towards one stop shop, so we hope that in the next assessment, we will see an improvement. The question is; "Where is the plan for diversified economies which looks at export and import replacement - mahogany, dairy, business outsourcing, aquaculture and manufacturing, for example?"

In 1988, SVT introduced tax free factories in manufacturing in Fiji and investors came in. Nearly 20,000 new jobs were created. Where are these attractive investor packages, Mr. Speaker, Sir?

While we welcome the ease of doing business, it is only a small component. We would have commissioned a taskforce driven by captains of industry, et cetera, FCEF, to create a genuine open one stop shop. Nations are moving into trading blocks and we need to reap the economic benefits from this.

On revitalising businesses; private investment in Fiji continues to decline due to the deteriorating business environment. This can only improve, if confidence and trust of the business community can be established through long-term policies. Short-term measures would not be useful in establishing confidence in the economy, and COVID-19 measures are only short terms measures. Institutions such as FRCS, FNPF, City Councils and Ministry of Labour need to organise joint conferences and meetings with the business community to recommend new policies.

Again, we are encouraging domestic investment by SMEs which are fully important, if not, more important than international investors. Financial resources can be made available through Government assistance which we have heard and we commend that. This will maximise both, economic and social outcomes. The Government needs to furnish clear guidelines regarding disbursement of funds and monitoring in order to minimise wastage.

On trade, we encourage more engagement with the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG). There is an MSG Trade Agreement and it is encouraged that this be exploited further and fully utilised. This is a fundamental legacy of the Fijian Government and this trading block can do better, if the Government encourages dialogue and further engagement with MSG. While we promote free trade we also need to protect our niche sectors, therefore, the current approach to remove duties from 1,600 merchandised items needs reconsideration.

The other issue which I would like to raise, Honourable Members, regarding the Budget Supplement, I note in Item 2.12 on Page 16, it reads, and I quote:

"A total of \$54.2 million was paid out to 85,959 individuals under Phase 1, of which 20,157 individuals received Government top ups totalling \$7.3 million with the remainder by FNPF."



So \$7.3 million is Government top-up and \$46.9 million is FNPF.

This cannot be termed as Government assistance because \$46.9 million was self-funded by the people and that can also be said of Phase 2 where 26,034 individuals were assisted with a total pay-out of \$8.2 million. Of this, 14,400 members have been provided with top-ups.

Again, only 14,400, were assisted not the 26,034 individuals. The 14,400 individuals were assisted but the balance were assisted through their own funds. I urge the Government not to make this kind of statement because it is misleading and it is not direct assistance. Again, I would like to encourage the Government to please, look at the direct assistance which needs to be given to our unemployed and the under-employed, those who are working part-time.”

Mr. Speaker, I finally refer us to Page 43 of the Budget Supplement. I have a question regarding the budgetary allocation for Fiji Broadcasting Corporation (FBC), amounting to \$11.7 million. Mr. Speaker, what is this organisation using that \$11.7 million for? From my understanding it is used for public broadcast, but what actually is this public broadcast, is it really worth \$11.7 million? That needs to be fully assessed and whether the value of that public broadcast is really a value to the Fijian people, and that needs to be questioned, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have used up your time.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you very much. I conclude by stating that this Budget should not be supported.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau for his contribution to the debate.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Assistant Minister for Sugar Industry, George Vegnathan.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, members of the media fraternity, our television audience and those tuned in through radio channels and those watching the live-streaming on the Fijian Government *Facebook* Page; good evening and *bula re*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I stand with great pride as a Member of the Bainimarama-led Government to dwell on the 2020-2021 Budget which, undoubtedly, is a masterfully crafted Budget that attempts to address the needs of all Fijians. This Budget is surely going to move our nation forward amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and has been expertly developed under the able leadership of our Honourable Minister for Economy.

The year 2020 has been anything but predictable. As we bid farewell to 2019, we were preparing to work towards our goal for a new year. But then our lives took an unexpected turn when COVID-19 was officially declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO).

We all are witnesses to the impacts of COVID-19, not only on the health and wellbeing of the people but in social and economic repercussions globally and more specifically, to our beautiful Fiji. We are fortunate to have a Government that was proactive and had prioritised the lives of our Fijians by carefully planning and implementing strategies to ensure that we are kept away from this pandemic that has infected millions around the world. Although we have been successful in combating the spread of this virus, Fiji will still need to work hard towards the path of recovery.

We are all aware that Fiji's economic activity has plummeted dramatically with the decline in tourism industry, amongst many other sectors. The FijiFirst Government's goal and aim has been to put ourselves in a position where we have fiscal and monetary buffers that provide insulation in lean times.

The FijiFirst Government sees that the task ahead is great and heavy in responsibility. It takes a challenge which calls for courage and boldness to dream, the courage to believe, the courage to dare, the courage to act, the courage to envision, the courage to fight, the courage to work, and the courage to achieve what seems to be illusive at this point in time.

This Budget has demonstrated the strong political will of the Government to lead to economic recovery during this COVID-19 pandemic. There is a need for the private sector and all the sectors to work with the Government, to help us get through this terrible time that we are going through.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Honourable Prime Minister again, and again, has demonstrated an unmatched quality of a good and true leader. His continued perseverance and dedication during difficult times is worth applauding. He never lost his vision for the betterment of all Fijians, regardless of what the situation was, whether it was a natural disaster, like Category 5 *TC Winston* or be it the COVID-19 pandemic.

I commend the leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Minister for Health for combatting the spread of this virus. When economies and advanced medical technologies, like the United States of America, United Kingdom and India, to name a few, are struggling to contain this virus, our Honourable Prime Minister handled the panic situation and kept all Fijians safe from this pandemic.

I will be failing in my duty if I do not convey my sincere appreciation to all Fijians who have taken the directive seriously from the Ministry of Health, thus assisting in making Fiji Coronavirus-free. A big thank you to each and every one of you.

To everyone listening in now, please, know that each and every one of us has the power to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. Careful financial planning, supporting Fijian businesses and realising the new normal, is the only way we can move forward. Never underestimate your power to make a change in this world. Therefore, I urge everyone to maintain the resilience; a quality we, Fijians, are known for.

The 2020-2021 National Budget is unique, and it shows solidarity to those who have to bear the brunt of this pandemic. It is the reassurance to our tourism sector that despite these uncertain times, we stand united and together with you.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government has always been prudent in addressing any difficult situation to provide support to our fellow Fijians. I commend and thank the Honourable Minister for Economy for his vision to revise and align the Budget to specifically target and assist those who are impacted by this pandemic, especially in the tourism sector. Despite our economy's revenue being reduced by more than 50 percent, smart thinking to produce the 2020-2021 National Budget - a consumption driven Budget to stimulate economic activity, is a way forward towards recovery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, even during these trying times when Government revenue has reduced, tax reduction on more than 1,600 items and without cutting salary of civil servants is not only a bold move, but a smart one. This is just basic economics. During economic downturn, government

spending should increase to stimulate economic activities. That is exactly what this Government has done.

The United Nations has also commended the Fijian Government for this bold and courageous Budget. Increasing domestic consumption will increase the demand for goods and services, thus increase the demand for labour to meet the increase in demand for goods and services. As a result, it creates employment opportunities within Fiji, which is the path of recovery.

Similarly, increase of grants on housing for investment and reduction on importation duties of building materials will encourage our locals to invest in houses and buildings. This will create more employment opportunities during these trying times within the economy. With all these new incentives announced by the Honourable Minister for Economy, of which, I only named a few, I am confident that it will definitely stimulate our economic activities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, this Government has demonstrated through the Budget, that they are truly for the people of Fiji, especially during these rainy days.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, even during these challenging times when the future is uncertain, Government will still honour its commitment to pay \$85 per tonne of cane for the 2020 crops. The Ministry of Sugar Industry is provided with a budget of \$30 million allocation for the stabilisation fund in the 2020-2021 National Budget. It is a testimony that our growers will receive \$85 per tonne of cane for the 2020 crops.

However, some Honourable Members of the Opposition misunderstood the basics of these payments. The payments are in four stages and the final payment is normally made in October, so the final payment will come in October next year, which is in the next financial year. I thank the Honourable Minister for Economy for clarifying the misinformation spread by a few Honourable Members across the House to demean the hard work and commitment of the Government towards the growers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, no other Government has ever provided so much assistance in the history of Fiji to our sugarcane growers. The FijiFirst Government is the only Government that has really put our sugarcane growers on the priority list. As I speak, on the figures today, the three Mills have crushed 359,757 tonnes of cane, compared to 284,356 tonnes for the same period in 2019, which is a 27 percent increase.

The crop for this year looks good and we are very certain that in years to come, sugar will definitely retain its place which it had before in Fiji's economy, that is, to take up the number one foreign reserve earner and be a foreign reserve earner in years to come. The trend seems good and we are very confident that we will reach that status.

The Government has also taken initiative for the sugarcane growers to diversify their income and as such, the Honourable Minister for Agriculture continues to distribute 30 kilogramme of rice seeds for planting to farmers so that they can plant rice. At the moment, one tonne of rice would fetch them \$800, so in time to come or with the current rate of distribution of seeds, we expect to yield around \$800 million worth of rice annually and this is definitely going to increase in years to come.

The other initiative offered to cane farmers continues, such as new farmer assistance for land purchase and planting, fertilizer and weedicide subsidies, cane access road grants, culverts and bridges and crossings for farmers, cane delivery subsidies, assistance to cooperatives to purchase mechanical harvesters, and the list goes on. So, you can see how the Government goes down to the

people that needs assistance at this point in time, apart from all the other Ministries which are offering assistance in their particular areas.

I can go on and on informing this august House about all the good things that the FijiFirst Government has done and which has positively impacted the life of all Fijians, but I will stop here due to time constraint. As I conclude, I believe that strong people-centred and consumer-driven Budget during this pandemic is the way forward, and I fully support this Budget. May God bless us all and Fiji. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Assistant Minister for Sugar Industry for his contribution to the debate.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to address this august House in support of the 2020-2021 Budget allocated to the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. The total Budget allocation to the Ministry for the upcoming fiscal year is \$159 million. This is certainly the highest budgetary allocation ever made to the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, COVID-19 is a profound shock to our societies which has led to dramatic loss of human lives across the world and presented an unprecedented challenge with deep social and economic consequence. Everyone is at risk of COVID-19. Everyone in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic has the same basic needs - the protection of rights, safety, access to medical treatment, services and care, food and income security, and jobs and livelihood. Yet, not everyone has the same level of access, often because of who they are or where they were, with the various aspects often intersecting.

Therefore, the Ministry is required to step into the new fiscal year with the determined approach and bold prioritisation that reaches the furthest behind to provide better and effective services to Fijians and those mostly in need. On that note, I applaud and thank the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy for the bold and decisive 2020-2021 Budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, across every sphere from health to the economy and security, the impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbated for the most vulnerable including; women and girls, people living in poverty, persons with disabilities, children, older persons, single parents, LGBTQI people and informal workers.

A central theme of the Sustainable Development Goals is the pledge that no one will be left behind. This commitment remains paramount for the Fijian Government and it is reflected in the Ministry's budget. The priority for the Ministry now is to ensure that the unprecedented effect of COVID-19 is managed and minimised, particularly in relation to its implications on those that the Ministry is mandated to serve. The Government does recognise that this is a human crisis and human beings must be at the centre of the response and recovery plans.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to highlight that the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation over the past five years, has seen considerable increases in its budgetary allocation. While we did have a slim cut in the 2019-2020 Budget, we were allocated a total of an additional \$20 million in the COVID-19 Response Budget, which aims to guarantee carrying-on payments to our social protection beneficiaries across different schemes. This was done against the backdrop of the

combined impact of COVID-19 and *TC Harold*. With the \$14.4 million increase in our 2020-2021 Budget, I confirm that this is the highest budget to have ever been allocated to the Ministry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$9.9 million of this increase has been through donor support funding from the Government of Australia. The rest is from the Fijian Government. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Australian Government for its generous support to the Fijian Government, as part of the Vuvale Partnership.

As the Honourable Minister for Economy had announced, \$7.8 million will be used to top-up the allowances of the Poverty Benefit Scheme, Disability Allowance and Care and Protection Allowance beneficiaries over two months.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the largest portion of the Ministry's total budget allocation in the new fiscal year is for the administration of the nation's core social protection programmes as in previous years. Those benefitting from these programmes, include women, pregnant women, single parents, children, the poor and persons living with disabilities and the elderly.

The Ministry is pleased that the 2020-2021 Budget will support to maintain existing social protection programmes which include the Poverty Benefit Scheme that targets poor households, the Care and Protection Allowance which seeks to assist less fortunate children in single parent households, or who are cared for by guardians or grandparents, and including children in residential homes under the care of the State.

The Poverty Benefit Scheme that currently assists over 25,000 households has received an allocation of \$38.3 million for the new fiscal year, whereas the Care and Protection Allowance Programme that currently assists 8,366 households has received an allocation of \$12.3 million.

In addition, the allowance of \$100 under the Social Pension Scheme will be maintained with the eligibility age remaining at 65 years. The budgetary allocation to the Social Pension Scheme in the new fiscal year is \$55.3 million. Currently, there are 45,898 recipients under this Programme. Interactions with current beneficiaries have revealed appreciation to the Programme because it has helped to restore the self-esteem and self-worth during an age where they are often seen as a burden, even to their own families.

This commitment is, again, reflected in the budgetary allocation for the National Council for Older Persons and the funding support given to the three state-owned homes for the elderly and also towards their much needed upgrade which is currently underway.

The expanded food voucher for rural pregnant mothers will be maintained at \$50 in this new budget year with an allocation of \$1.2 million in the new fiscal year. So far 3,127 women have benefited from this Programme in the current financial year.

We also continue to administer the disability allowance with an allocated budget of \$9.3 million. This Programme currently supports over 8,000 beneficiaries at the amount of \$90 a month. We have heard from Honourable Qereqeretabua about the importance of the budget for the modification of homes for persons living with disabilities. She said, and I quote:

“The loss of funding to Habitat for Humanity will mean that persons with disabilities may have to wait five to seven years to get assistance from private benefactors. Many may not get any assistance at all.”

This statement, Mr. Speaker, Sir, intentionally glosses over the fact that there is a budgetary allocation for the modification of homes for persons living with disabilities under the Ministry of Housing. As Honourable Members of this House, we must always give full facts because thousands of people are listening to us and believing every word that we say as Members of this august House. It is irresponsible to gloss over important facts like that, because there are thousands of disabled persons out there listening to us.

First, it was about tinned fish earlier today and now about disabilities. It may not be the same amount that was allocated in the current year, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but the budgetary allocation is there. She is right, in that the budget is not being given to Habitat for Humanity. That does not mean that the service will not be provided. The role of modifying homes will now be carried out by the Ministry of Housing with carpenters from the Public Rental Board and the Ministry itself.

To the Honourable Qereqeretabua and others from the Opposition who may wish to preach to this Government about the importance of Fijians living with disabilities, please, do not, just do not! We know how important they are. It was this Government that gave meaning to the empowerment of people living with disabilities in this country, making them visible in laws, policies and programmes. It was this Government that had the heart to give them a special place in the Constitution and followed this through with laws, policies and programmes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, across five Ministries of Government, Government has allocated a total of \$21.8 million to empower Fijians living with disabilities in the coming fiscal year. The Opposition has the audacity to call this Budget “irresponsible”, “rudderless”, “theoretical” and “deceiving”. Tell that to the over 80,000 Fijians who rely on social protection net of Government which my Ministry is honoured to serve!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to share that the Ministry also received an allocation of \$20,000 which will ensure the continuation of the re-certification exercise to ensure that those benefitting from social welfare payments are, in fact, those who are supposed to be benefitting from it. For this exercise, all social welfare beneficiaries, except for those receiving the disability allowance, are required to fill out a form to be witnessed by authorised personnel, basically to prove that they are still alive and are the ones receiving the social welfare allowance. To-date, 79 percent of all relevant beneficiaries have fulfilled the re-certification requirement.

For those who have not fulfilled this requirement, their allowances will be suspended from August. Such allowances will continue to be suspended until the re-certification requirements have been fulfilled. If these requirements are not met by November this year, allowances will be terminated. This is in line with Government’s ongoing efforts to ensure that the social protection net truly captures those who deserve to be helped.

So, it is an appeal to those of our beneficiaries who may not have filled out the re-certification forms to come forward and fill these forms out, so that you do not have your allowances suspended. We will also be working on the upgrade of the Social Welfare Management Information System which is supported by the Government of Australia and which has been allocated \$2.1 million.

On another note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have been advised during the day about large number of our beneficiaries crowding BSP premises around the country for fear that they may not get their allowances if they do not switch banks. I advise that the social welfare payments will continue to be deposited in beneficiaries’ allocated bank accounts, depending on the banks they have already nominated. There is no need for social welfare recipients to change accounts to BSP right now. The Department of Social Welfare will contact recipients over time to make the options known and it will

be their choice if they wish to change banks. Until the Department of Social Welfare contacts you with further information, please, do not worry about changing banks now.

Mr. Speaker, currently the Ministry chairs the National Coordinating Committee on Children (NCCC), the national body that is made up of Government entities, civil society and international organisations, such as UNICEF and ILO, that looks at improving the lives of Fijian children. We are happy to receive an allocation of \$100,000 in the new fiscal year for the Child Protection Programme. We are also given funding of \$300,000 as grants to voluntary organisations that run eight residential Homes around Fiji for children who are under the care of the Director of Social Welfare.

We are pleased with the Community-Based Corrections Programme budgetary allocation of \$250,000 which will enable us to continue to strengthen community-based corrections mechanisms as an alternative form of sentencing for those who qualify under the relevant law.

Mr. Speaker, in the new fiscal year, we have been allocated \$3.2 million to continue with the revamping and upgrading of the Homes for the elderly. It is envisaged that the allocated budget will enable us to finalise the capital works at the Labasa Home, which is expected to finish in the next few months. This will give the residents in the Home a more dignified and conducive environment that they can enjoy.

Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to share that the Ministry continues to fully operate the two toll-free National Helplines during the COVID-19 lockdown periods, namely; the Domestic Violence Helpline - 1560, administered by the Fiji Women Crisis Centre and the Child Helpline - 1325, administered by Medical Services Pacific. We are pleased that both Helplines have been allocated a budget of \$200,000 each. The Helplines have been crucial in intercepting emergency calls related to abuse of women and children, and providing them the necessary assistance as required. And we look forward to continuing to provide the services effectively in the new fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry is privileged to be able to work with our partners from the non-Government sector in dealing with the mandate that we have - empowering women, children, the elderly, those living with disabilities and the poor. Examples of these strong partnerships, include the:

- National Coordinating Committee on Children (NCCC);
- Fiji National Councils for Disabled Persons (FNCDP);
- National Council for Older Persons;
- Gender-Based Violence Working Group;
- COVID-19 Response Gender-Working Group; and
- National Working Group on the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls.

Honourable Professor Prasad, when it comes domestic violence, we work very closely with our non-Government partners.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry is satisfied with the 2020-2021 budgetary allocation for the Department of Women as a policy and advocacy unit of the Fijian Government for the advancement of gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.

The 2020-2021 Budget reaffirms the Fijian Government's commitment to the agenda of gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls with the allocation of \$2.9 million, complemented by an addition of \$2.7 million, which is supported by our development partners, including the Government of New Zealand, Government of Canada, UN Women Pacific Partnership Programme, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)

and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). To this end, I would also like to acknowledge the Australian Government for their invaluable technical support provided through the funding of our National Gender Advisor, who is instrumental in assisting the Department of Women in implementing all of the Ministry's core projects and programmes on the empowerment of Fijian women and girls.

The impact of COVID-19 has highlighted the heightened inequalities, particularly in relation to women and girls' safety and limited access to economic resources, while women's frontline role as health workers in service industries and in the care economy have become more visible than ever before. We now all know that Fijian women are essential service providers. We also have seen gender-based violence increasing, at home, online and in public spaces. The situation demanded that the Ministry, more than ever before, adopts strategic and bold approaches with focus on areas of highest priority to address the inequalities and place all Fijian women and girls in gender equality at the front and centre of recovery plans, if we are to build inclusive resilience to future shocks, in line with the 2030 agenda.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to share that the Ministry, in the new fiscal year, is well-placed to move forward with the introduction and implementation of a number of important strategic initiatives, including the:

- development of Fiji's National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls;
- roll out the Gender Transformative Institutional Capacity Development initiative across Government institutions;
- development of Fiji's Country Gender Assessment;
- roll out of Service Delivery Protocol Phase II;
- kick-start of an evidence-based and an inclusive dialogue as well as tailored interventions on women's economic empowerment; and
- resilience building with focus on Micro and Small Women-Owned Enterprises, self-employed women and women in informal sectors, particularly across handicraft and cultural industry.

It is important to underscore that the breakdown of the 2020-2021 budgetary allocation for the Department of Women includes an additional \$100,000 for NGO grants and a significant increase for Women's Institution Funds with an allocation of \$500,000.

Mr. Speaker, we have all heard from Honourable Salote Radrodro today about the Barefoot College. I would like to reassure Honourable Radrodro that the construction works at Barefoot College has started and the budgetary allocation of \$3 million will assist us in continuing with the construction of the project.

Honourable Radrodro has suggested that we should not continue with this construction at this time, I beg to differ. If COVID-19 has taught us anything at all, it is to look at alternative forms of employment which do not rely on external customers. Barefoot College will do just that - empower women to become solar engineers and micro-business owners within their own communities, complementing Government's efforts in promoting green energy in rural communities.

So, Mr. Speaker, I firmly believe that it is during such a time as this that we need projects like Barefoot College to be prioritised and I am grateful for the allocation. I simply cannot understand how one can promote the empowerment of Fijian women and girls and in the same breath, shoot down a project like this.



Mr. Speaker, Sir, there has been an obsession with funds kept under “R” in the National Budget. The Opposition has made it to sound like we will not get the money under ‘R’, nothing could be further from the truth. To put this into perspective, for the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation in the current year, approximately 80 percent of our Budget was under ‘R’. As of today, 99.74 percent of that Budget under ‘R’ has been released to the Ministry. The obsession is simply unfounded, Mr. Speaker.

To conclude, the new fiscal year looks promising. The Ministry is adequately resourced with the 2020-2021 Budget.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Do not be scared of ‘R’!

The Ministry is adequately resourced with the 2020-2021 Budget to carry on with its important ongoing and new strategic programmes. We recognise the challenge that COVID-19 has posed on us, but we are determined to give the best possible services to Fijians and those most in need.

This is a time of reckoning for our national and personal values, and recognition of the strength of solidarity for public services and society as a whole. With this, we are prepared to take on the new fiscal year with greater motivation and ability to serve our people better.

They say that the greatness of a nation can be judged by how it treats its weakest member. One needs to look no further than the Budget for the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, to see just how great our nation is. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation for her contribution to the debate, and I now give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- *Vinaka vakalevu*, Mr. Speaker.

The Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Cabinet colleagues including Honourable Assistant Ministers and all Honourable Members of Parliament who are still here; first and foremost, I want to say that I rise to absolutely commend the 2020-2021 National Budget that was presented by the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy.

Mr. Speaker, this Budget is the most important Budget in the history of our nation, not only the history of the last 10 years or since Independence, but the history of our nation.

Last night, I was reading about Ratu Cakobau’s Government, then I was reading back at the first Colonial Government, and I was reading back and reading forward till the late *Turaga na Tui* Nayau’s Government and some of the things that happened through 1987 and the *coup* then by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. I remember it very well because I was a student in Lautoka and my parents’ salaries were both deducted by 20 percent. We had our family who came and lived with us because they were struggling and it was a difficult time because we were all struggling during that time. So, I can actually see the importance of maintaining the salaries of our civil servants because during these difficult times, they would be supporting their family members and you can

imagine what they would be feeling if they went through what I and my brothers and sisters went through when my parents' salaries were deducted.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I also want to acknowledge my grandmother who was unwell recently. She is 98 years old and my cousin called me to say that she would be listening in tonight, so Bui, thank you. I think it is your bedtime also, so you can go to bed now. Also, I want to acknowledge those who are on social media and Team Fiji on *Twitter* that are hearing in tonight.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to begin by just rebutting some of the statements that were said before. First and foremost is that famous door. Honourable Tikoduadua, that door was repaired and if it is recently bad, then I would not know that. But I can tell you that, that door was repaired and that block that was there, is left there because sometimes when patients enter, they need to keep the door ajar in case the patient runs into a problem so they can be able to call.

I only worry that you nearly took a photo of a naked patient inside the bathroom, and I wish that the next time you intend to take a photo inside the hospital, you follow the normal routine by going to see the Medical Superintendent and say that you want to take a picture.

The Medical Superintendent is Mr. Luke Nasedra, who is from Wainibuka and your *kai*. It is only ethical and morally important that you visit him and say that you want to take a picture. Please, do not do that next time. We will fix the door, if it is bad again, but it was fixed.

Mr. Speaker, we also know that with COVID-19, we have had those cases and Fiji was the 163rd case. Now, we also have to remember that during that time, there were challenges already in China and we know that a lot of consumables and drugs are manufactured in China, so there were already major disruptions to the supply chain of pharmaceuticals.

Mr. Speaker, there was an inevitable global shortage followed suite. We were quite fortunate that we were able to act quickly and coordinate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Fiji Missions abroad to assist in approaching contracted wholesalers, who released and sent our equipment and medical supplies that we had already purchased.

I would like to give an example due to the diligence and resilience. We had the dialysis machines that we had purchased from Australia, ready for shipment and the kidney transplant drugs from Sydney Airport to Auckland Airport in a week, then finally shipped to Nadi Airport with the assistance of our Customs Team at the border. During this time, the supply of leptospirosis diagnostic kits and dengue kits remained available at our health facilities.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Qereqeretabua in her verbal diarrhoea during today's session, mentioned that there was issues with cervical cancer tests because of pap smears not being available. That, again, is a lie. It is misleading Parliament.

We have several ways of doing cervical cancer testing. We use pap smear, which is both an automated or manual method, and the new machine that we had bought had run into problems and it was during the time of guarantee. The company that was based out of New Zealand was wanting us to pay an amount of NZ\$35,000 which we do not have to so we sought legal redress and they were told that they had to pay. They came across and they repaired that, but in the meantime, we used the manual method. Apart from that, we use VIA, I will not say what it stands for because it sounds gross, but we also use colposcopy and biopsy. So the women were not compromised during that time. The machine was fixed and the ThinPrep for this will be available (and I have been told) by the beginning of August which is about a week away.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed budget of \$394 million is more than the \$347 million. I was told by our Director of Finance and Administration that about more than 95 percent of our present budget has been used up, including those in “R” because we have been using it, as you know, because of normative functions that we need to be able to do, but also the COVID-19 budget has been very helpful in being able to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic.

It will be remiss of me without first and foremost, Mr. Speaker, helping us to understand what COVID-19 has done to the health services of our people and also the region. As we speak, there is more than 16 million people worldwide that has got the disease and 650,000 deaths. The epicentre of the disease is in the Americas, but we are seeing it beginning to take off in countries around us and recently, we have seen its exponential rise in Papua New Guinea, including its first confirmed death.

Mr. Speaker, we have 27 cases, 18 cases initially with community, then transmission within these clusters and then we have had nine cases that are quarantine border cases. Those are cases that were coming back, they are likely to have received the virus when they came from India and they are being quarantined in Nadi and also, at the moment, in Lautoka Hospital.

Mr. Speaker, the world health systems are struggling with the pandemic response. They are not only struggling but we are seeing high morbidity and mortality numbers. Hospitals and health facilities have become the centre of disease outbreaks, which have led to instances of close of hospitals and health facilities.

Mr. Speaker, it has been estimated in one of my readings recently that about 500 people in Old People’s Homes in Australia are vulnerable and are at risk with COVID-19. So we have to understand that this is the extent to which COVID-19 is placing pressure and pressure points on the health systems and ultimately, on the normal workings of any country or any region. The support systems for health that deal with production and supply chain for medical equipment, medicine and medical supplies initially were severely paralysed and continue to be partially paralysed at times.

Mr. Speaker, for us in Fiji, we are grateful to the decisive leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister, supported by my senior colleagues and the Honourable Attorney-General and the Minister for Economy, members of Cabinet, Honourable Assistant Ministers and Caucus, as we have been able to effectively tackle the disease. When it reaches our shores, again, with the effective guidance given to the Officials who are the Civil Servants, they were then able to carry out the strategies of Government and those strategies are being talked about now in the global spaces.

As I have said in my earlier speeches, the WHO and our development partners have been asking us to share on what we have been able to do. The Global Alliance for Vaccine and Immunisation (GAVI) which is supported mostly by the United Kingdom, asked the Honourable Prime Minister to speak about our response, and he asked me to do it on his behalf.

I spoke about our response and they wrote back to say that after that they were able to gather quite a few billion dollars’ worth of support from all around the world to GAVI for the immunisation or for the vaccine for COVID-19. So, you can see the importance that we are now beginning to play in this area of COVID-19 around the region, around the world because they are beginning to see how effectively we have been able to control it and take hold of it.

We have been strong in the six pillars that I talked about before, the:

- (1) strong and effective border control measures, multi-agency contact tracing and quarantine enforcement;
- (2) App that is in place now;

- (3) comprehensive communication and awareness strategy;
- (4) strengthening of our health services, facilitated by the supplementary and specific budget for COVID-19;
- (5) support of our partners, donors and friends; and
- (6) commitment, love and patriotism of all Fijians who stepped up and stepped forward in the effort to support the Government as we face COVID-19 pandemic threat.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we did not stop there, we continued and we have worked on. Initially we bought and received 14 new ventilator machines which we distributed into the new COVID-19 ICUs in Lautoka, Labasa and Suva that were necessary for those who may require ICU. We have also bought extra 50 ventilators that have been prepaid for a sum of more than \$4 million. The first five, we will receive in the middle of next month, to be able to build again the capacity of our ICUs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we receive 80 donated humidified high-flow or AIRVO machines from the New Zealand Government and we have trained our staff and purchased the consumables to be compatible with those machines.

We have bought 50 hospital beds at about \$60,000. Mr. Speaker, we have continued to buy necessary equipment specifically for COVID-19, which is worth more than \$2 million of supply, in supporting our frontline staff and, again, purchase of other things that are important.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this does not even include the fact that we have had to pay staff who are now engaged in the fight against COVID-19. So that budget will continue with the budget that we now have in place for COVID-19 in the 2020-2021 Budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during this time, we also fought the measles outbreak and I have said this before. We had 100.14 percent of the targetted population in children and 94 percent of the targetted population in adults immunised. We purchased the vaccine that were used and mobilised 760 health staff to implement this exercise.

We also had, in that span of five months, three Cyclones namely; *TC Sarai*, *TC Tino* and severe *TC Harold*. For that, Mr. Speaker, we mobilised our health staff all over the country to be able to provide health screening and treatment, and provide the protective health measures that were important.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we look at the last three decades and how we have been continuing to improve, and then recently within the last decade we can see that we are beginning to achieve our Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets. Let me share a few.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for maternal mortality rate, the SDG target is 70:100,000. We are now at 35.6. Neonatal mortality rate, the SDG target is 12 by 2030, we are at 12.2.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also pushing out into the community, that this we will continue in the next financial year because of the support that is provided into our public health component.

We are working with community stakeholders in terms of the WASH aspect but also making sure that we prevent the other communicable diseases. We have had many of those whom we have been involved with, saying how fortunate they were to be able to see the support that is coming through from the Ministry of Health, working hand in hand with other stakeholders in Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the \$25 million that has been allocated to the COVID-19 Response would be used to strengthen and support the multi-agency incident management team in supporting the public health response and the health and economic recovery phases we are in. It will be used to:

- procure infection control items, such as hand gels, mask, aprons and PPEs that are required for our frontline staff in the management of COVID-19 cases or suspected cases;
- support of running of the fever clinics, the ICUs, ACUs;
- facilitate our risk communication activities;
- support the FEMAC capability which will be required if there is future wave of infection in the community; and
- support the quarantine costs to continue in its critical role to safely manage returning Fijians and permit holders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also want to talk a little bit about the support for overseas treatment. If Mr. X is a cardiac patient sponsored by Government for overseas treatment for his heart condition and he was accompanied by Mrs. X and they earned less than \$30,000 a year, after a successful treatment in hospital, they were tested for COVID-19 and allowed to travel back to Fiji with a negative result but before entering Fiji, they already knew they must go into quarantine for 14 days.

On arrival, they disembarked and were met by our border control team, they were checked for symptoms and were directed for admission into our quarantine facility. Screening was conducted, the filling of the supplementary health arrival card and health officials taking their temperature readings and other information, such as special dietary requirements. They then underwent normal immigration and customs processes. Their luggage were disinfected and once they picked up their luggage, the health and RFMF personnel briefed them on the quarantine procedures and rules. They were tagged and told which hotels they were allocated and they were transported to the designated quarantine facility using Government designated vehicles.

During the quarantine period of 14 days, they are checked daily by our quarantine team, comprised of health and military personnel. The full cost of quarantine for COVID-19 is borne by Government.

On the same trip, if Mr. Z was also part of the returning passengers, who had gone to India for heart operation but paid for by his medical insurance scheme, he undergoes the whole process, including his quarantine period and are all paid for by Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the welfare of our frontline staff, the budget will enable the Ministry to also provide counselling support for our frontline team, as they deal with the challenging task of caring for potential COVID-19 cases at the border.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also have to realise that if we do not get any severe cases of COVID-19, we are able to redirect the use of equipment and supplies for those patients who urgently need them. As I have alluded to, the AIRVO machines, we started to use them for severe cases of typhoid and leptospirosis in our Intensive Care Units. And also, the ventilator machines if ultimately they are not needed, they can be then used for normative functions in looking after those who are very sick.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have begun to also remodel our health service provision, based on the universal health coverage. We have looked at our strategic plan and also the National Development Plan which is 20 years and the five-year Strategic Plan.

What we have then realised is that, all over the world under WHO guidance, they are all talking about decentralising services, ensuring that you are working in a way that the health systems

or the health centres or hospitals do not become the epicentre of the disease. This has actually put upon us the idea to quicken those targets that are in place, and this budget will allow us to do that, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It will help us to decentralise quicker and even more.

As we speak we are beginning to see specialists and the Honourable Assistant Minister talked about it today, the specialists being asked to go and do clinics in health centres and Sub-Divisional Hospitals. Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we speak today, the Consultant Paediatrician or child doctor at CWM Hospital, Dr. Ilisapeci Tuibeqa, and her Registrar, Dr. Torika, are currently in Lakeba looking at children, and are also looking at those children in islands around Lakeba who may have heart diseases.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, beginning on 5th August, 2020, Nadi Hospital will provide paediatric, obstetric and gynaecological internal medicine specialist care to the people who access Nadi Hospital for health services, and this will be supported by weekly visits by specialists from Lautoka Hospital.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, about a month ago, the Emergency Departments within Valelevu and Nausori are being run by the Emergency Specialists at the CWM Hospital. Now, as the Honourable Assistant Minister has also said, Makoi and Nausori Maternity Units are now being run by the Obstetrics and Gynaecology Department at CWM Hospital. We are also intending to set up incident management teams, like Divisional and Sub-Divisional Command Centres in our health division and the provision of this budget will enable us to do that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 105 new doctors, 200 nurses and 40 midwives will complement the staff that we have. We have now in Fiji about 1,450 doctors. Those 1,450 doctors puts our doctor to population ratio at 1:1.5, which is a great and good number. This has happened because consistently over the last six to seven years, this Government has continued to increase the number of scholarships, increase the positions within the Service, and more importantly, increase the salaries of health staff to be able to retain them.

One of the reasons why we have been able to fight this fight well also is because with the Open Merit Recruitment System (OMRS) that we have in place, allows us to have the best people available to be able to fight the fight that we have. For example, like Dr. Jemesa Racaca; Dr. Alisha Sahu Khan; the Acting Permanent Secretary we have at the moment, Dr. James Fong; they are there on merit and that has allowed us to be able to do what we are able to do.

I would like to finish with this thought, Mr. Speaker. There were suggestions from the other side of the floor that we live within our means. Our current Ministry of Health budget salary bill for SEG 1 and SEG 2 is \$202 million. If we were to live within our means and the forecast revenue is \$1.8 billion, we know that 10 percent of the budget is for health. That means that the Ministry of Health in this 2020-2021 National Budget will only have \$180 million. We will not be able to protect this nation in our normative functions and also with COVID-19 with \$180 million. We need the \$395 million and that is what this 2020-2021 Budget has done.

Mr. Speaker, I highly commend this Budget to the House and I fully support it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services for his contribution to the debate.

Honourable Members, the night is young. We will now adjourn and we will finish this agenda item tomorrow at a more convenient time for everyone. I know you are feeling as tired as I am, so I am going to adjourn now.

I thank you for your contributions today. I look forward to your presence tomorrow where we can deal with this agenda item. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 9.32 p.m.